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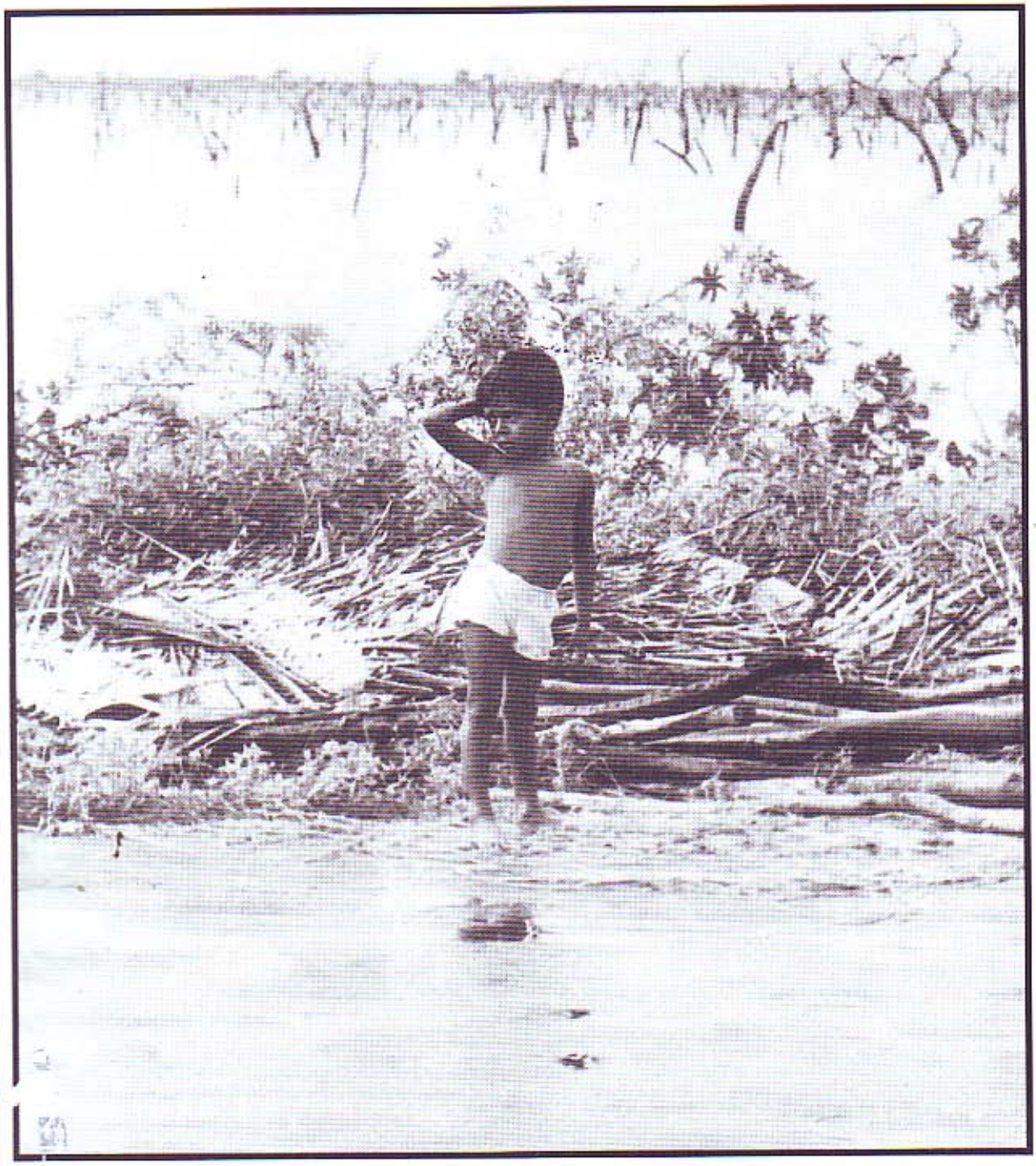

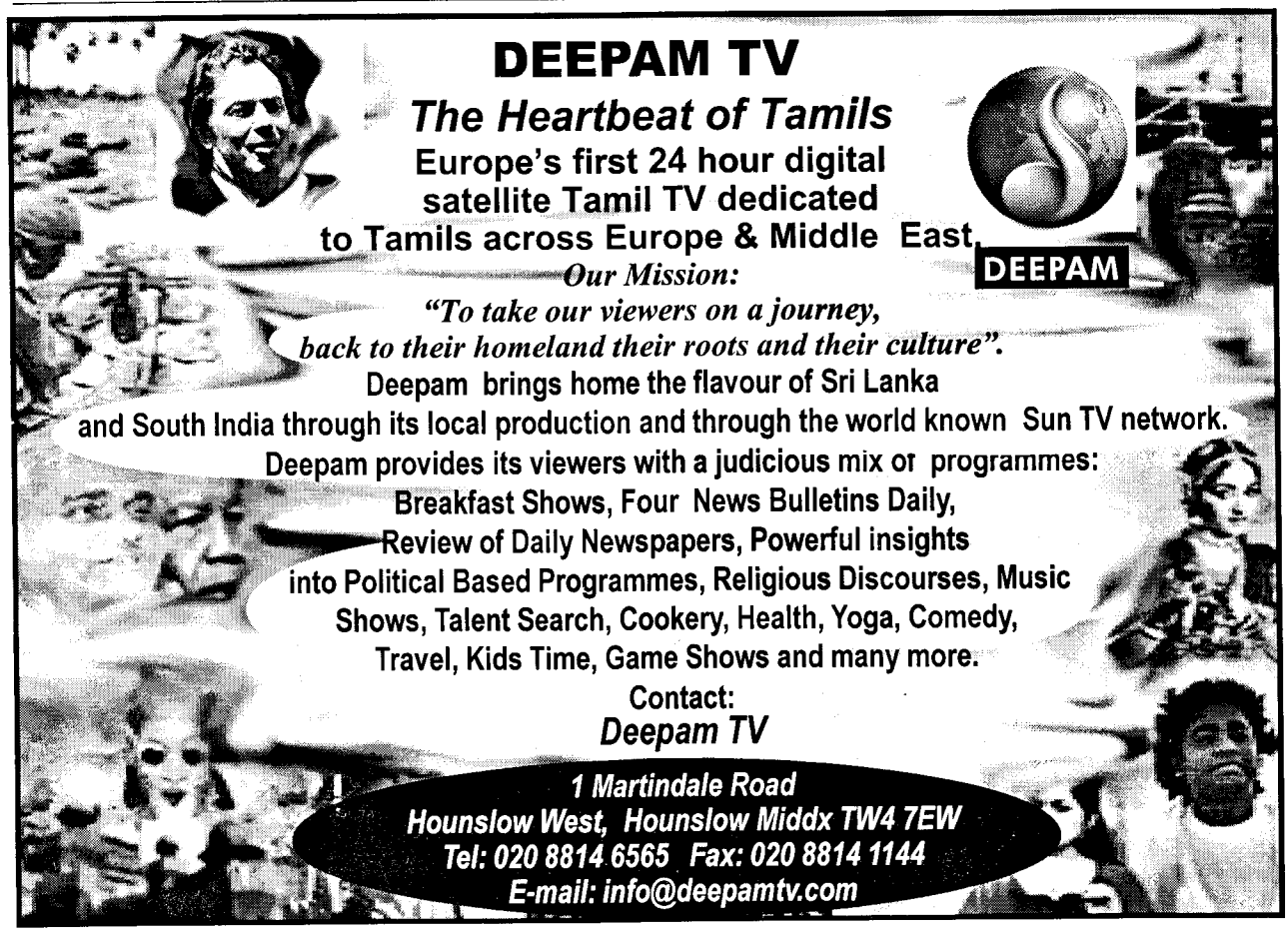

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-Voltaire

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Terrorism Act and the Peace Process

Never before has a law enacted in a foreign country generated so much acute attention and widespread interest within Sri Lanka as has been the case with the Terrorism Act 2000 which came into force on 19 February 2001. The issue was whether the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), which has its international secretariat in London, would be designated a terrorist organisation and included in the list of proscribed organisations in the United Kingdom under the provisions of the Act.

The Sri Lankan government has been conducting a sustained campaign to secure the LTTE designated as a terrorist organisation even before the enactment of the Terrorism Act, which received its Royal Assent on 21 July 2000. The LTTE had already been outlawed as a terrorist organisation in India and the United States.

For many weeks before 19 February, there has been frenzied activity within and outside Sri Lanka to persuade, and even pressurise, the British government by both sides, for and against the proscription of the LTTE in the United Kingdom.

The LTTE and its supporters within and outside Sri Lanka lobbied hard and wide, involving church and peace groups, against the prospect of a UK ban of the organisation. Its main international spokesman and advisor, Mr Anton Balasingham, asserted that the peace process advocated by the international community with Norwegian facilitation for the resolution of the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka would be irretrievably scuttled if the LTTE were to be outlawed. He added that such action would also bring into question the neutrality of the British government in the ongoing conflict in the island. That the LTTE feared the probability of facing a ban in the UK was underlined when he said, "The moment the LTTE is proscribed, I will no longer be a legitimate representative of my people, rather I will be labelled as a 'terrorist' leader with severe restrictions on my political freedoms, including the freedom of speech and opinion. Whatever I say on the emancipation of my people will be construed under the logic of this law as a conspiracy against a constitutionally constituted Government."

Within Sri Lanka, a coalition of Tamil parties and groups made repeated representations to the UK and other western diplom- ats based in Colombo not to ban the LTTE. Tamil university students in the north and east of the island carried out demonstrations and signed petitions urging the non-proscription of the LTTE.

On the opposite side, in a high level intervention by President Kumaratunga and Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar called upon the British government to ban the LTTE in accordance with its obligations to fight international terrorism. They also contested and sought to refute the LTTE's claim that a ban on the LTTE in the UK would inevitably lead to the scuttling of the peace process.

Jumping on the pro-ban bandwagon, extremist Sinhala nationalist groups in the south of the island also engaged in street demonstrations and collecting signatures from members of the public calling for a ban on the LTTE.

During the weekend before 19 February, the LTTE in London undertook an organised operation emptying shops and other premises which had stocks of video tapes showing films of famous victorious Tamil Tiger battles against government forces and other memorabilia indicating that the LTTE was approaching the crucial date with real apprehension. On the other hand there was jubilant anticipation

in official government circles both within the island and outside that the LTTE would certainly on the banned list.

The date arrived and passed without the British Minister of Home Affairs not producing a list of proscribed organisations to the great disappointment to the government and the pro-ban campaigners and profound relief to the LTTE and its anti-ban supporters.

The reality that has to be noted is that the Terrorism Act is now in place and in force in the UK. When and if the Minister of Home Affairs will produce a list of proscribed organisations is entirely a matter for the British government, the decision being taken on the basis of its own national interests not ignoring its international obligations. But in the meantime, any organisation or individual may become liable to be prosecuted for actions that are deemed offences under the Act. For instance, any person who provides, or invites another person to provide, or receives or uses or possesses money or other property, and intends or knows or has reasonable cause to suspect that the money or other property may be used for the purposes of terrorism commits an offence under the Act.

Terrorism itself is given a very wide definition. The use or threat of any action that (a) involves serious violence against a person; (b) involves serious damage to property; (c) endangers a person's life; (d) creates a serious risk to the health or safety of the public, or (e) is designed seriously to interfere with or seriously to disrupt an electronic system would constitute terrorism if -

- the use or threat is designed to influence the government or to intimidate the public or a section of the public, and
- the use or threat is made for the purpose of advancing a political, religious or ideological cause.

Any action, which involves the use of firearms or explosives, is deemed to be terrorism even if it is not designed to influence the government or to intimidate the public or a section of it. The Act covers terrorist acts committed within and outside Britain and against government of the UK as well as a government of a foreign country.

Now that enough energy has been dissipated by both sides delving into the action that the British government might or might not have taken on 19 February, it is time that the parties to the conflict in Sri Lanka concentrate their minds and efforts in an attempt to taking the peace process forward.

The omens look promising. Both the government of Sri Lanka and the LTTE see the need for and have agreed to enter into negotiations. Both have agreed to Norwegian facilitation. The international community, including the countries comprised in the European Union, United States, Britain and India have fully supported this endeavour to bring about a resolution of the conflict within the frame work of the territorial integrity of Sri Lanka taking account of the aspirations of the Tamil people.

The LTTE itself has declared a unilateral ceasefire for the third month in succession. Although the government has not reciprocated positively with its own ceasefire, many have observed a substantial reduction in the level of military operations leading to relative lull in the fighting in the north-east front. The message brought back by the multi-faith peace team that visited the Vanni recently and met LTTE representatives is quite significant in that the LTTE is now prepared to drop its demand for a separate state in return for a just negotiated settlement on the ethnic issue.

President Kumaratunga has herself confirmed that talks between the government and LTTE are to begin 'soon'. Reports indicate that one of her reasons for her current visit to New Delhi is to brief and keep the Indian Prime Minister informed about the parameters and prospects of potential talks with the LTTE. Following her discussions with the Indian Prime Minister, an official press release stated that India had "reiterated its consistent support for the unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Sri Lanka and for a negotiated political settlement of the conflict as the only way to restore lasting peace which would meet the aspirations of all elements of Sri Lankan society."

The Norwegian facilitator, Eric Solheim, has also been quite busy shuttling between Oslo, Colombo, the Vanni in northern Sri Lanka and London having discussions with government and opposition leaders, the LTTE leader himself, and the LTTE's Chief negotiator Mr Anton Blasingham. A draft Memorandum of Understanding between the government and the LTTE is under discussion and yet to be finalised.

The other important sections of Sri Lankan society have to actively engage themselves in assisting the gathering momentum for a peaceful negotiated settlement to go forward. The main opposition United National Party and its leader Mr Ranil Wickremasinghe have a special responsibility in the process, particularly in the context of the fact that the governing Peoples Alliance led by President Kumaratunga does not possess sufficient strength in Parliament to deliver a constitutional settlement that will bring a satisfactory peaceful end to the ethnic conflict.

It is true that past efforts at peace making in Sri Lanka have been thwarted, but there is no purpose served in apportioning blame as to whom was responsible. The unilateral ceasefire declared by the LTTE for three months in succession, and the message brought back by the multi-faith team from the Vanni are certain positive factors that the government should not just dismiss as mere 'stunts'.What is also new in the present situation is that there is a fund of international interest, goodwill and support for a peaceful resolution of the conflict in Sri Lanka. When the parties decide to talk and talks begin leading to a credible supervised ceasefire, they must avow never to return to violence until a settlement is reached. ●

UK Ban on Tigers Would Not Affect Peace Process

- EU mission

February 24 - European parliamentarians expressed support for Norway's attempt at ending Sri Lanka's separatist war and said a British ban against Tamil rebels will not jeopardise the peace process.

Gerard Collins, the head of the five-member MEP delegation visiting Sri Lanka, said the European Union had made its position clear to Britain that "all those who engage in terrorism" must be banned.

Sri Lanka has been pressing Britain, its former colonial master, to proscribe the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) who maintain their "international secretariat" in London. Anti-terrorism laws went into effect in Britain from 19 February, but London is yet to announce the list of organisations that will qualify under the new legislation.

Collins said he did not believe that any banning of the LTTE in Britain would cause a hurdle for the Norwegian attempt to bring the LTTE and the Sri Lankan government to the peace negotiating table. "Terrorism must be condemned for what it is ... The LTTE has been banned in several countries, including the US. So we do not see any problems (for the peace process) if they are banned in Britain," said Collins who is from Ireland.

Collins made an impassioned appeal for support for Norway's peace envoy Erik Solheim who has been shuttling between Colombo and London, where the Tamil Tiger chief negotiator, Anton Balasingham is based. Balasingham has warned that a British ban against them would derail the peace bid of Norway.

Collins said he did not expect quick results from Norway's attempts to bring the antagonists to the negotiating table and warned that the process could take years and there would be many obstacles along the way.

He said it was up to peace envoy Solheim to decide on the right time to get both parties to agree to a truce and sit at the negotiating table. "It would be a big challenge to just get them to talk about talks," he said.

More than 60,000 people have been killed in Sri Lanka's drawn out Tamil separatist war led by the LTTE which is seeking an independent homeland in the island's northeast.

Collins and his team which visited the embattled northern peninsula of Jaffna said their first impression was that people there were resilient and he saw a "relaxed and calm atmosphere" as people interacted with security forces.

However, he said they were also told of shortages of medicines and problems of transport and supplies for residents of Jaffna, a region the security forces wrested from rebel control in December 1995.

"A doctor told us they had a shortage of family planning drugs in Jaffna and they feared there could be a population explosion at some time," Collins told reporters in Colombo. "There was also one man who felt he was like in an open prison camp."

Collins said the EU delegation which met with senior Sri Lankan leaders had raised the question of improving the country's human rights record and ensuring democracy.

The EU was pressing for the government to implement recommendations of a EU committee that monitored Sri Lanka's October parliamentary elections.

"We cannot forget the large number of people who were killed during those elections ... We are very concerned about human rights and democracy and have raised specific issues with the Sri Lankan government," Collins said.

The massacre of 26 Tamil detainees at an open prison camp at Bindunuwewa in October last year was raised with the authorities, the EU delegation said adding that they have promised early action against the perpetrators. (AFP)

Tigers Extend Ceasefire And Call Govt to Respond

The Tamil Tigers, in an official statement issued from its headquarters in Vanni, Northern Sri Lanka, said on 22 February that they would extend their unilateral ceasefire by another month, and called on the international community, particularly the United States, Britain, the European Union and India to persuade the Sri Lanka government to reciprocate favourably to its goodwill gesture.

The LTTE's unilateral ceasefire was due to expire 24 February. Following is the text of the LTTE's press release:

"The LTTE has been strictly observing a self-imposed truce for the last two months in spite of provocative military operations by the Sri Lankan armed forces. The Tamil Tigers declared a month long cease-fire on the 24th December 2000 as a gesture of peace and goodwill for the festive season and called upon the Government of Sri Lanka to reciprocate positively. But the government of Chandrika Kumaratunga rejected the LTTE's peace offer as a 'political stunt' and launched major offensive operations in the Jaffna peninsula to regain territories at the cost of heavy casualties on both sides. The LTTE strictly observed peace and engaged only in defensive war during the period. To demonstrate its genuine desire for peace the Tamil Tigers extended the unilateral cessation of hostilities for another month from the 24th January 2001 to 24th February 2001.

"We have decided to extend the truce for another month as a gesture of goodwill and to provide further space and time to help to promote the facilitatory peace effort undertaken by the Norwegian Government. In spite of serious military disadvantages in a defensive war, our decision to observe peace for a further period amply demonstrates our serious and sincere commitment to peace and peaceful means of resolving the political conflict. We are determined to offer maximum opportunity to peace efforts because the entire Tamil nation yearns for peace and normalcy. It is the collective aspiration of the Tamil community that the war which has been ravaging our historical homeland for decades should be brought to an end and peace talks commence. There is a growing mass upsurgence in Tamil areas demanding peace and self-determination, in defiance of Sinhala military occupa-

tion and repression. It is in compliance with the collective will of our people we are pursuing the path of peace.

"We are sad and disappointed to note that the Sri Lanka government has not, as yet, responded positively to our peace gesture. Instead, it had dismissed our self-imposed cessation of hostilities as a political 'gimmick' to cover up our 'military weakness'. Having discredited and rejected our genuine gesture of peace and goodwill, Kumaratunga government has embarked on a massive project to modernise its armed forces with high-tech lethal weapon systems pouring billions of rupees and pushing the country to the brink of economic disaster. By rejecting the LTTE's peace offer and by refusing to endorse the Norwegian project for de-escalation, the Sinhala regime has demonstrated to the world that it is deeply committed to a military option of war and violence callously disregarding the colossal damage it could cause to the life and property of the Tamil civilian masses.

"We wish to reiterate that our liberation organisation is prepared to enter into peace negotiations when the Sri Lanka government reciprocates favourably to our unilateral declaration of cease-fire and agrees to implement the Norwegian 'Memorandum of Understanding' aimed at the de-escalation of war and the normalisation of civilian life. At this critical stage we wish to make a fervent appeal to the international community, particularly the Untied States, Great Britain, European nations and India, to use their diplomatic good offices to persuade Sri Lanka to abandon its destructive militaristic approach and adopt the rational path of peace, reconciliation and constructive dialogue."

LTTE No Longer For Separate State, Say Religious Leaders

Religious leaders, who held talks with the LTTE in northern Sri Lanka on their return, said the group was ready to give up its demand for a separate state in return for a negotiated and just peace.

Bishop Malcolm Ranjith, head of the Roman Catholic Church in the Ratnapura district of southern Sri Lanka, who was in the delegation of the Inter-Religious Alliance for National Unity (IRANU) which travelled to Madhu in Mannar district for the meeting said the LTTE appeared genuine in its desire to talk peace with the Government. "The only message we are carrying from the LTTE is that they would be very willing to talk to the Government and seek a settlement to (the ethnic) question at the table," Bishop Ranjith told journalists Colombo on 20 February."It was very clear they were no longer pursuing the line of separation. We got the feeling that they are now ready to give up their armed struggle in return for a just peace which assures the dignity and legitimate aspirations of the Tamil people."The IRANU delegation gained this impression after closely questioning the LTTE about its position on a separate state, he said. When asked whether the LTTE had dropped its demand for separate Tamil Eelam, Rev Malcolm said that the LTTE representatives had said that "Eelam" was only the Tamil name for the entire Sri Lanka, and "Tamil Eelam" only a reference to the Tamil areas of the country's north and east. "Their idea of a Tamil homeland is not to build a wall between the north and the south, but to allow people from the south to enjoy all rights in the north and vice versa," he said.The delegation included 18 Buddhist monks, three Bishops, a maulavi and members of the National Peace Council. The talks lasted for three hours with an assistant to the head of the political wing, Mr. Tamilchlevam, the leader of the youth wing and the leader of Mannar district, identified as Mr. Sudha, Mr. Pulithevan and Mr. George respectively.

Bishop Ranjith said they were confident that these cadres represented the views of the top leadership. A scheduled appointment with Mr. Tamilchelvam fell through as the delegation arrived late.

Now, IRANU has sought an appointment with the President, Ms. Chandrika Kumaratunga, to brief her of its discussions with the LTTE.

He said the religious leaders told the LTTE cadres with whom they held talks that their leader, Mr. Velupillai Prabhakaran, should address the Sinhala people directly and explain to them that the LTTE had no intention of dividing the country.

He said the three LTTE members who participated in the meeting did not explicitly commit themselves to the extension of the unilateral ceasefire, which is due to end on February 24, but gave "signs of hope" that this might happen. But they wanted the Government to make some gesture of goodwill in return to indicate that it was sincere about talking to the LTTE, like allowing more food supplies into areas controlled by it in order to alleviate the sufferings of civilians. The LTTE also agreed to release two Sinhalese fishermen among about 20 captives after an appeal by the delegation. "The release was agreed to as goodwill gesture,'" Siyamabalgaswewa Wimalasara said from the northern town of Vavuniya, adding the Tigers had also promised to consider freeing five other civilian captives. He said the two fisherman, Ajith Kumarasiri and U.B. Chandrapala, were captured by the rebels two months ago while fishing in a lake near Vavuniya, 250 km (155 miles) north of the capital Colombo. Wimalasara led a delegation of 18 Buddhist monks as part of the multi-faith delegation.

Statement

A statement issued by the IRANU and signed on its behalf by Ven. Kumburugamuwe Vajira Nayaka Thero, Ven. Talalle Dhammaloka Nayaka Thero, Ven Vatinapaha Somananda Thero, Rt. Rev. Dr.Malcolm Ranjith and Fr.Anthony Cyril stated:

"We, as representatives of the Inter Religious Alliance for National Unity, went on a pilgrimage to Madhu Church (a famous shrine in Sri Lanka dedicated to Our Blessed Virgin Mary situated in the North, in the diocese of Mannar) on 18th February 2001.

The group consisted of 18 Buddhist Priests, One Catholic Bishop, 3 Catholic Priests, 1 Muslim Maulawi, some representatives of National Peace Group and some media personnel. The necessary permission was obtained from the Ministry of Defense and the Sri Lanka Army Authorities. This pilgrimage provided us with the opportunity of observing the evils and the many horrible consequences of the war on human beings.

Meeting those displaced due to the war and experience the terrible hardships they are going through. Meditating and

praying together - bringing together the values of the religions we follow in the Cause of National Peace.

During this tour, we were also able to meet four representatives of the LTTE, with whom we were able to hold a very fruitful and hopeful discussion.

From what we saw, heard and experienced during this tour, we are convinced that a meaningful praiseworthy and lasting solution to our ethnic conflict depends in open discussions/negotiations between the Sri Lankan Government and the LTTE organization. The LTTE representatives we met made it very clear to us that they are for a peaceful solution to the ethnic conflict through discussion. The last act of goodwill on their part to show their willingness to discuss, was the unilateral declaration of a cease-fire by the LTTE. They expressed their willingness to continue such acts of good will. Their ability to continue the war has not been diminished or weakened at all. They hope that the political leaders of the South will not push them on the path of war. We were also able to share some of the doubts and fears of the Sinhala people regarding the LTTE.

We expressed our firm decision that we cannot accept any terrorist activities on the part of anyone. We also requested them to continue the good will they have shown by declaring a unilateral ceasefire.Basing ourselves on this valuable experience, we earnestly request all responsible people of our country to give up the path of war and enter into a peaceful process through discussion and negotiation. We make this appeal to the: Sri Lankan Government, all political leaders of the present Government and those of other parties, members of the LTTE, other social and political forces and the Citizens of Sri Lanka:

Let us get together to build a peaceful and united country that respects the Identity of each group of people living in our country. Let us create the atmosphere that enables each one to participate in the national life of the country without being discriminated against due to race or religion.

We condemn the present bloodshed and the terrible destruction of human lives. War and terrorism are not paths that lead to peace and justice. War and destruction of life cannot be justified by any of our religious convictions.

We bless the willingness of the Sri Lanka Government and the LTTE to come to the negotiating table to search for peace. We hope and pray that they will not have recourse to any action that take them away from the negotiating table. We dedicate ourselves to usher in an era of peace in Sri Lanka based on equality and justice. We earnestly hope for the support of all our country to this cause of peace." ●

UK Decision Must Not Obstruct Peace Process

The National Peace Council of Sri Lanka in a press release issued on 21 February states, "For the past two months, the issue of the impending British decision whether or not to ban the LTTE has taken centre stage of public interest. Both the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE seemed to be deciding on their actions with the British ban in mind, and not with making a success of the Norwegian-facilitated peace process in their minds. The indefinite postponement of that decision by the British government is an opportunity for the two parties to get away from an overemphasis on the British ban and to take positive steps regarding the peace process.

The National Peace Council believes that an undue amount of importance has become attached to the issue of the British ban. It must be borne in mind that the British legislation to ban organisations deemed to be terrorist was developed to protect their interests, not with our interests in mind. Whatever decision the British take will not change in the slightest the issue of justice and the need for power-sharing between the ethnic communities in Sri Lanka.

We appreciate the LTTE's unilateral ceasefire entered into on December 24 and which continues to this day. The lull in the fighting that this ceasefire has made possible is of utmost relief to the war weary people of Sri Lanka, and especially of the north-east. We call on the LTTE to renew its ceasefire on February 24 and the government to reciprocate this ceasefire with immediate effect. We also call on the government and LTTE to immediately commence peace talks with a mutually agreed ceasefire, and we ask that these happen prior to, and regardless of, the British decision on whether or not to ban the LTTE under their law. The British decision to delay naming the organisations they wish to ban was taken no doubt with their own interests in mind, not ours. That decision must not lead to a break in the prospects of a permanent end to the fighting in our country.

In this context, the message brought back by the delegation of inter-religious leaders who visited the Wanni with the National Peace Council and met with the LTTE earlier this week is a most hopeful one. The LTTE representatives had said that the LTTE was prepared to drop the demand for a separate state if a peaceful and just solution was negotiated with them by the government. We urge that the government takes this opportunity to start the negotiation process without finding various reasons to delay making a positive response. The prolongation of the conflict, and the failure to resolve it, will continue to bleed the country physically, economically and morally.

Peace Talks to Start 'Soon'

Sri Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunga says she expects peace talks with Tamil Tiger rebels to start soon. In an interview with CNN in Delhi, she said the two sides could probably meet in two months because the Tigers had asked for time to implement certain conditions.

Her comments are her most optimistic yet on the possibility of face-to-face negotiations with the Tigers, who have been waging an 18-year-old war for an independent homeland.

Although Mrs Kumaratunga has said her government will not respond to "fake" ceasefires, her comments on the Norwegian-brokered peace process have become increasingly upbeat. Speaking at Independence Day celebrations earlier this month, she said the Tigers were sending out positive signals in response to her offer of peace talks.

Norwegian envoy Erik Solheim has

been shuttling between the government and the Tiger leader Velupillai Prabhakaran in an attempt to get negotiations under way. But on 23 February, Mrs Kumaratunga said both sides would now have to decide the date for the start of talks.

Despite her optimism, however, the president expressed her lack faith in the LTTE's commitment to the peace process saying that the Tigers were an organisation "born, bred, fed and living on violence", adding that she did not know how they would survive in a democracy.

Meanwhile, the Norwegian facilitator in the Sri Lankan peace process, Mr.Erik Solheim met the LTTE's chief negotiator Dr.Anton Balasingham in London on 20 February and discussed a wide range of issues in a "cordial atmosphere", the TamiNet website said on 21 February quoting sources in the LTTE.

The three-hour meeting over lunch assumes significance in the light of the British decision on 19 FEbruary not to ban any foreign terrorist organisation just now under its new anti-terrorism law. While this decision has removed a possible stumbling block in the peace process for the time being, there is still a danger of the LTTE's getting banned at any time because the provisions of the law are "draconian". Dr.Balasingham and Mr.Solheim are reported to have discussed this possibility. They also discussed the possibility of the LTTE's extending its unilateral ceasefire for the second time on February 24.

A spokesman from India's External Affairs Ministry on 20 February denied reports that India had objected to the UK and Japan being included on a monitoring committee which will watch and evaluate an ongoing peace process between the Government and the LTTE. Some eight countries have been identified by Norway to sit on this committee. Norway has encountered a stumbling block however as both the Government and the LTTE have objected to certain countries being on the committee.

Some nations, the Government is not keen to have as the countries are perceived to be sympathetic to the LTTE. The Tigers have also voiced concern over some countries which the Tigers say are supplying arms to the Lankan Government. ●

Chandrika's Visit to India

21 February : The Sri Lankan President, Mrs Chandrika Kumaratunga, will begin a three-day visit to New Delhi on 23 February, amid considerable confusion in Colombo over India's position on the Norwegian-backed initiative aimed at resolving the conflict in the island.

During her last visit to India in December 1998, Mrs. Kumaratunga signed the Free Trade Agreement with the Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee. Since then, she has been re-elected as President, and her coalition voted back to power.

Sri Lanka's military fortunes have waxed and waned since then, till, at the moment, the security forces are maintaining the stalemate they managed to restore in Jaffna peninsula after offensive by the LTTE in April last. Now Sri Lanka is at the threshold of talks with the LTTE, and an Indian input at this stage is seen crucial.

"The President's visit to India can be seen as a prelude to peace talks," according to a Foreign Ministry official. Mrs. Kumaratunga, who is scheduled to meet Mr. Vajpayee and the External Affairs Minister, Mr. Jaswant Singh, on February 23, would "compare notes" on the Norwegian-facilitated peace process among other matters of "mutual interest", he said.

While New Delhi has expressed support for the Oslo initiative to bring the two sides to the negotiating table, it is not yet clear how far India is willing to be a fellow passenger in this exercise. The Indian position is for a negotiated solution that meets the aspirations of the Tamil minority community within the framework of Sri Lanka's territorial integrity. However, Sri Lanka would want to know how comfortable India is with LTTE as the main negotiator for the Tamil people.

"It is hard to believe that India would want the LTTE, that killed a former Prime Minister and more than 1,000 of its soldiers, to wield any sort of state power, even if it is in partnership with the Sri Lankan Government, which is a possibility if the talks are held and are successful," said Mr. Jehan Perera of the National Peace Council.

A recent statement by the Home Minister, Mr. L. K. Advani, in the Rajya Sabha, that the Government of India had revived the demand for the extradition of the LTTE leader, Mr. Velupillai Prabhakaran, has served to reinforce the persistent and widespread belief in Sri Lanka that India would somehow scuttle the Norwegian initiative.

Besides India's open hostility to the LTTE, its purported reluctance to countenance "outsiders'" dabbling in the affairs of its neighbour beyond a point is also cited as a reason for this. That is one reason why a report in a Sri Lankan weekly newspaper that India had opposed the inclusion of Japan and the U.K. in an international committee proposed by Oslo to monitor goodwill gestures by both sides prior to talks, since denied by the External Affairs Ministry, has found ready believers.

Peace activists attribute Sri Lanka's tough posturing on the peace talks and its refusal to reciprocate a unilateral cease-fire by the LTTE to the Government's confidence that India would support this.

Against this background, Mrs. Kumaratunga's visit is being viewed as a mission to "test the waters" and perhaps even to discuss the parameters for talks with the LTTE.

Besides the peace initiative, Mrs. Kumaratunga is also likely to raise the issue of reviving the SAARC process, paralysed since India vetoed the 1999 Kathmandu summit after Gen. Pervez Musharraf assumed power in Pakistan. Understandably, Sri Lanka is reluctant to preside over a lame-duck regional grouping and is keen to hand over the chair, which it has held since 1998, as quickly as possible to Nepal. The issue figured during the visit of Sri Lankan Foreign Minister, Mr. Lakshman Kadirgamar, to Islamabad recently, where he held meetings with the Pakistani Chief Executive, and the Pakistani Foreign Minister, Mr. Abdus Sattar.

India will also be briefed about Pakistan's offer to Sri Lanka of a US$ 20 million loan to buy military hardware from it. Although Indian officials deny that that India is not perturbed by this, the Indians may want to be taken into confidence in this matter because the loan offer adds a new dimension to the existing Pakistan-Sri Lanka military co-operation. ●

Norway to Promote Peace With Financial Assistance

A Norwegian delegation that visited Sri Lanka recently said that Norway was "impatient till Sri Lanka finds a permanent solution to the North and East conflict and we will extend maximum possible assistance to Sri Lanka in order to find a solution."

Norway, which is trying to broker peace between the government and Tamil Tigers, on 15 February pledged 160 million rupees ($1.8 million) toward research in Sri Lanka's rural economy and for improving industrial production methods.

The head of the visiting Norwegian delegation, the Secretary of State and the Head of the Development Co-operation Delegation of the Norwegian Government Sigrun Mogedal, signed the grant agreements with industrial development minister Gamini Peiris after they began the annual political consultations on bilateral co-operation. Norway pledged 130 million rupees ($1.5 million) for the establishment of a National Cleaner Production Centre to promote efficient and environment-friendly industrial production, a statement from the Norwegian embassy said.

A further 30 million rupees ($348, 229) in assistance will go toward rural development research, with focus on private sector development, employment generation and sustainable institution building.

Norway has been a donor to Sri Lanka for more than 20 years, mainly funding projects in rural development, rehabilitation and reconstruction, social development and vocational training.

Ms. Mogedal had reiterated Norway's readiness to assist the peace process in Sri Lanka. She said Norway would assist Sri Lanka in its struggle to find a solution to the North and East conflict and help the people who are in the middle of the struggle as a gesture of the longstanding relations between the two countries, he said. Norwegian peace envoy Erik Solheim has been trying for the past two years to get the two sides talking.

"We are impatient till Sri Lanka finds a permanent solution to the North and East conflict and we will extend maximum possible assistance to Sri Lanka in order to find a solution. Peace is not a contract, it's a relationship between the parties", Ms.Mogedal said. She said that when finding a lasting solution to a vexed problem there can be ups and downs but confidence building measures should not be abandoned. She said "we are highly impressed with Lanka's high human rights standards and economic achievements despite fighting an expensive war," Mogedal said.

She said that the Norway is very concerned about the depoliticisation of Public Administration and the elimination of corruption in order to maintain good governance. Addressing the Delegation Minister of Constitutional Affairs and Industrial Development and Deputy Minister of Finance G.L. Peiris thanked Norway for its efforts to find a solution to Lanka's ethnic problem.

He said the Government is very keen to end the North and East conflict at the earliest possible opportunity to achieve greater heights in economic and social development. Despite fighting war, Sri Lanka achieved a 4.3 per cent growth rate and 17 per cent export growth rate last year mainly due to the Government's strict fiscal discipline, he added. The Minister said that Sri Lanka experienced a difficult period last year after the fall of the Elephant Pass Military base which resulted in a rise of the defence expenditure to Rs. 84 billion. We plan to bring down the defence expenditure to 5.5 percent of the GDP this year.

Prof. Peiris said: "the Government's new Constitution addresses vital issues which concern minority communities. In addition, four vital commissions which would help minimise corruption and improve public administration in the country has also been encompassed in the proposed Constitution as the Government is ready to take all measures to eradicate corruption in the Public Service. The Judicial Service Commission and the Public Service Commission also function independently in order to maintain a high standard of public service."

Minister Peiris also noted that the Government established the Child Protection Authority, reactivated the Human Rights Commission and set up the Anti Harassment Committee to assure the human rights of citizens. He said the Government would also appoint a Deputy Ombudsman. ●

Defence Budget Rockets As War Continues

Sri Lanka's budgeted defence expenditure for 2001 is Rs.63 billion, up 21 per cent from the Rs.52 billion a year ago, according to the Appropriation Bill tabled recently in Parliament by Minister of Constitutional Affairs, Industrial Development and Deputy Minister of Finance Prof. G.L. Peiris.

The Defence expenditure for this year is estimated at Rs.63,389,023,000 over Rs.52,434,271,000 a year ago. The allocation for the Sri Lanka Army is Rs. 29,203,990,000 up from the Rs.23, 598,000,000 while the allocation for the Sri Lanka Navy is Rs.8,257,000,000, up from the Rs. 7,823,000 and the budget for the Sri Lanka Air Force is Rs.10, 700,000,000, up from the Rs.8,290,938. The Police

Department has been allocated Rs. 12,371,800,000, up from the Rs.8,290, 938,000 in 2000.

The Ministry of Finance and Planning has been allocated the second highest expenditure of Rs.46.30 billion, up from the Rs. 34.11 billion a year ago.

The third major item of expenditure is the Ministry of Provincial Councils and Local Government whose allocation is Rs.38.34 billion. Of this sum, Rs.27.02 billion has been allocated for civil administration.

The fourth highest expenditure is for the Ministry of Public Administration, Home Affairs and Administrative Reforms whose allocation is Rs.20.10 billion. Of this allocation Rs.19.31 billion will be for the Pensions Department.

Despite the increased defence and administrative expenditure, the Govern-

ment has allocated substantial funds for both welfare and development, according to the Appropriation Bill.

Of the cabinet portfolios relating to welfare, the allocation for health is Rs.19.64 billion. Of this, Rs 14.54 billion will be for the Department of Health Services.

The allocation for education is Rs.15.4 billion. Of this, Rs. 14.77 billion has been allocated for human resources development and Rs. 601 million to the Department of Examinations.

The allocation for the Ministry of Samurdhi, Parliamentary Affairs and Upcountry Development is Rs. 15.29 billion of which Rs. 10.91 billion has been allocated for the Department of Poor Relief and Rs.2.72 billion forsocial security and welfare.

The Ministry of Transport has been allocated Rs.12.92 billion. The allocation for Highways is Rs.14.36 billion of which Rs.14.33 billion has been allocated for infrastructure development.

The allocation for the Ministry of Social Services and Housing Development for Fishing Community is Rs. 4.73 million of which Rs.4.2 million been allocated for social security and welfare through the Department of Social Services.

Of the development expenditure, the Ministry of Power and Energy gets the highest allocation of Rs.16.78 billion of which Rs.16.76 billion is for infrastructure development. The Agriculture Ministry has been allocated Rs.5.69 billion. The allocation for the Ministry of Irrigation and Water Resources Management is Rs.2.4 billion. Of this Rs.1.60 billion will be for infrastructural development.

The allocation for the Ministry of Plantation Industries is Rs.3.89 billion of which Rs. 3.68 billion has been allocated for economic services in the plantation industry. The Ministry of Food and Marketing Development gets Rs.222 million. The Ministry of Forestry and Environment has been allocated

Rs.1.79 billion. The Ministry of Estate Infrastructure and Livestock Development has been allocated Rs. 921.6 million.

The allocation for the Ministry of Constitutional Affairs is Rs.4.7 billion. The Ministry of Port Development and Southern Development has been allocated Rs,2.52 billion. The Ministry of Aviation and Airport Development has been allocated Rs.1.12 billion of which Rs.1.06 billion has been allocated for economic services.

The Ministry of Tourism and Sports has been allocated Rs.906 million. The allocation for the Ministry of Fisheries and Aquatic Resource Development is Rs.2.63 billion. The Ministry of Youth Affairs will get Rs.626 million. The Ministry of Vocational Training has been allocated Rs.1.79 billion.

The Ministry of Higher Education and Information Technology Development has been allocated Rs.7.73 billion. The allocation for the Ministry Posts and Telecommunications is Rs.9.46 billion while the allocation for the Ministry of Urban Development, Construction and Public Utilities is Rs.12.32 billion. The Ministry of Land Development and Minor Export Agriculture has been allocated Rs.2.44 billion. The allocation for the Ministry of Mahaweli Development is Rs.5 billion.

Of the service sectors, the allocation for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Rs.3.35 billion. The Ministry of Information and Media has been llocated Rs.1.51 billion. The Justice Ministry has been allocated Rs.3.03 billion. The allocation for the Ministry of Cultural Affairs is Rs.718 million. The Ministry of Science and Technology's Allocation is Rs.1.31 billion. The Ministry of Ethnic Affairs, National Integration and Mineral Resources Development has been allocated Rs.452 million.

The allocations for the other Ministries are: Ministry of Buddha Sasana and Religious Affairs - Rs.149 billion; Ministry of Indigenous Medicine - Rs.554 million; Ministry of Rural Industrial Development Rs.230.57 million; Ministry of Development, Rehabilitation and Reconstruction of the North and Tamil Affairs for the North and the East - Rs.2.18 billion; and Ministry of Women's Affairs - Rs. 147.62 million. The Ministry without portfolio has been allocated Rs.22.45 million. ●

Sinhala Only Gives Way to English

In 1956, Sri Lanka promoted the Sinhala Only language policy. Two generations later, Sri Lanka is beginning to feel the short sightedness of Sinhala Only.

In a report datelined 18 February, Nirupama Subramanian reporting from Colombo for the "Hindu" filed a story how the English language assuming pride of place in the island which reads as follows:

It is after school hours, but in a make-shift classroom in a quiet corner of a Buddhist temple in Colombo, away from the busy traffic on the arterial road outside, a group of teenagers are toiling away. They are learning English, a language officially neglected by Sri Lankan policy-makers in state education for over 40 years, but one that now even children realise they cannot do without anymore.

"Knowing English is important for leading a good life," said 15-year-old Mohammed Irshad, who wants to become a computer operator. For Rs. 70 a month, Irshad's parents send him to this 'tutory' so that he gains at least a working knowledge of English.

Like Irshad, thousands of children, and adults, across the island are crowding to teaching shops, sometimes paying fees they can ill afford in order to learn a language that will open the doors to the world of higher education and well-paying jobs.

English is taught in schools (most schools in Sri Lanka are state-run), but neither sufficiently nor competently enough to give students even a passable ability in it, a legacy of the community and discriminate against the Tamils in education and jobs, the Act made Sinhala the official language of the country. English as a medium of instruction was banned and all schools had to teach either in Sinhala or Tamil. As a second language, it was progressively neglected, as it became harder to find English teachers.

Two generations later, Sri Lanka is beginning to feel the short-sightedness of Sinhala Only. Like it or not, English is the key to information in a world of growing opportunities.

But a majority of young Sri Lankans are discovering the hard way that this world is closed to them. As a result, while the 1956 Act was a conscious attempt to accentuate the ethnic divide, it has turned inwards on the majority community itself, creating a huge mass of educated unemployed, reducing mobility, heightening the class divide and rais-

ing social tensions.

It has led to resentment against the Sri Lankan elite, for whom English was always "first language". Even if they did not learn it at school, they spoke it at home, and that became their passport to higher education and jobs, effectively cutting the rest out. English came to be known as kaduwa, or sword, with which the elites cut down the lower classes who did not know the language and had no access to it.

There is now a belated realisation in Government that the knowledge of English is a must, and it forms the vital centre-piece of educational reforms being implemented by the Kumaratunga Government. From the year 2002, it will be re-introduced as a medium of instruction for A level (class 12) students in the science stream. It is believed that science students would have less problems adjusting to the new system than in other streams.

There is also a proposal to begin teaching it as a compulsory second language from class 2, instead of class 3 as it is done now. From 1999, schools have begun using activity-based oral English from class I.

"We believe that equity can be brought about only by teaching English to all, not denying it. It is a big factor in enabling social mobility," said an official in the education department who did not want to be named.

The reforms were pushed in part by the private sector, which was facing difficulties finding 'employable' people to fill its posts.There is also the view that English could become the link language that will heal the ethnic wounds of Sri Lanka.

Opinion is still divided on whether English should be brought back as a medium of instruction or the Government should concentrate on strengthening it as a second language, but no one disputes its importance anymore.

But now, Sri Lanka faces another problem, and that is to find people fluent in English and qualified to teach it. As Mr. Yohan Casie-Chetty, principal of St. Thomas Prep, a leading Colombo school, put it, there is only a 'small reservoir' to draw from. About 500 teachers are being trained for next year's A level experiment. But if English is to make a wider comeback in Sri Lanka, many more will be required. ●

An Exhibition of Terror

Reminiscences of the era of terror during the late 1980's were enlivened again as the parents and relatives of those who were killed by the JVP were commemorated on 16 February at Piliyandala not far away from Colombo.

"Commemoration of those who were killed by the JVP" a two-day exhibition of pictures and memorabilia connected to the region of terror during 1987-90 commenced 16 February at Piliyandala Co-operative Hall.

"Ours is a nation that forgets and forgives quickly. But there's a need to show the blunders of the past to today's "generations to avoid the repetition of such mistakes again," said the Prime Minister Rathnasiri Wickramanayake opening the exhibition to the public.

Minister Alavi Moulana said that people must learn from the lessons of the history and never should recommend such violence for the sake of power. "People must resist anybody or any political party attempting to grab power by violence. This exhibition gives us an example for the consequences of petty, partisan and parochial politics practised by the JVP which I think will never follow the footsteps of its former leaders. They should have regretted and must have asked for the forgiveness from the entire nation before they enter into mainstream politics in a society to which once they were cruel," he said.

Indicating the weeping and crying relatives of victims of the unidentified gunmen in late 80's, the Minister said, "I also can understand how these people feel the loss of their kith and kin. My brother and in-laws were killed in 1989 and 1990. I could not even see the body of my brother-in-law. I received the body of my brother nine days after he was killed," he lamented. Learning from these mistakes although it is bitter is worthy rather than forgetting them, he added.

Pictures of victims including students, political party members, bhikkus, professionals - all who could not follow the orders that came in the form of small chits carrying the signature of Keerthi Vijayabahu of the Deshapremi Janatha Viyaparaya (DJV), were shown in the exhibition. Photocopies of letters

issued by the DJV, the active wing of the JVP after it was proscribed by then government, also were displayed unfolding the ugly facets of the alleged attempt of the JVP to grab power at the gunpoint.

Parents and relatives were seen sighing and grieving for their children, brothers and spouses allegedly killed by the JVP.

Mrs. M. D. Medagedara, holding a picture of her son Gamini Medagedara who was allegedly killed by the JVP on 12 February 988 at Polonnaruwa, was one of the relatives who had gathered at the exhibition. Recalling the loss of her eldest son, she said that she was at Raddoluwa and could not even see the dead body of her son as the JVP had ordered a curfew.

Her second son, Anura Medagedara said: "How can we be sure that this mistake would not happen again? After 1971, we thought that it would never come again. But the same mistake was repeated in 1987-90 and we lost a large number of innocent lives. We have doubts that this would rise again and will lead to another destruction. Now the time has come to ask ourselves whether we should allow a repetition of this?"

(Courtesy – The Island)

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Tea Workers Strike for Wage Rise

February 22 - Sri Lanka's tea estate workers are agitating for a wage hike to meet the rise in the cost of living following the sharp increase in the price of many essential goods and services and the depreciation of the currency since last June.

MPs of the Ceylon Workers Congress (CWC) began a 'satyagraha' at Hatton in the tea growing Nuwara Eliya district on Monday demanding a Rs. 400 cost of living allowance per month for the workers from the plantation companies.

The Government has appointed a five-member committee to look into the demand, but Mr. R. Yogarajah, one of the MPs, today said that the agitation would continue till the demand is met.

A breakaway group of the CWC now banded together as the Ceylon Workers' Alliance, said last week that though it had not been consulted on the satyagraha, it would not oppose the demand.

There are an estimated 500,000 workers in the tea plantations. Most of them are Indian Tamils whose forefathers came to Sri Lanka in the 19th century to work on the estates.

The CWC wants the Government to extend to the plantation workers a July 2000 Presidential notification granting all private sector employees a wage hike of Rs. 400.

But under the notification, those employees who were given a wage rise under a collective agreement between January and July 31, 2000, are not eligible for the allowance.

Mr. Yogarajah said the exclusion clause was included 'deliberately' to discriminate against the plantation workers, whose unions had entered into a collective agreement in June 2000. The agreement gave the workers an increase of Rs. 6 per day, and was signed on the day the Government widened the trading band of the rupee, which effectively neutralised the gain. Under the agreement, the trade unions forfeited their right to strike for more wages for two years, which is why the CWC has resorted to a satyagraha.

The agreement, signed between a employers' federation and three trade unions including the CWC, has come in for strong criticism by other trade unions as anti-labour.

The plantation companies have said they would be unable to bear another wage increase, but the CWC position is that with a record tea production and high exports, the employers can more than afford to give the workers a little more.

"The increase of Rs. 400 cannot cost the companies more than Rs. 2 billion for the whole year. This is just 10 per cent of the total revenue increase (for the tea industry) from 1999. This is something they can share with the workers," Mr. Yogarajah said.

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Protest Against LTTE Ban

20 February -Thousands of Tamil students, both in northern and eastern Sri Lanka demonstrated urging the United Kingdom government not to ban the LTTE. Students have collected signatures for a petition opposing the ban and political prisoners have written a letter to British Prime Minister Tony Blair.

The protest demonstrations and petitions are being organised amidst fears that the LTTE, which has its International Secretariat in London, could find itself without a home if Britain imposed a ban under a new terrorism law which came into force on 19 February. More than 4,000 university students and school children took part in the latest protest in the eastern town of Batticaloa in eastern Sri Lanka. Protests took place at the teacher training college and the university campus where demonstrators burned an effigy of the Sri Lankan Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar. The minister is himself a Tamil but has been carrying on a sustained campaign internationally to have the LTTE banned as a terrorist organisation.The students also called on the international community to exert more pressure on Sri Lanka to enter peace talks with the Tamil Tigers. And in the northern town of Jaffna, reports say, more than 1,000 university students and teachers lit candles as a gesture of support.

Many Tamil political parties and groups also have made representations to the British High Commissioner in Colombo not to ban the LTTE in the UK.A British Home Office spokesman said the ban was still "under active consideration" by Home Secretary Jack Straw, A BBC report said. But a decision on the Tigers had yet to be made, he added, without saying when it might be due.

A report datelined 17 February said that the Sri Lanka army exhorted the people of Jaffna over loud hailers not to put their signatures on the memorandum by students of the Jaffna University urging the British government not to ban the LTTE and stymie the peace process in Sri Lanka. Meanwhile, the SLA arrested two Jaffna University students who were collecting signatures for the memorandum at Navindil, near Vathiri junction, 23 kilometres northeast of Jaffna. The two students had been taken to the Udupiddy SLA camp for interrogation, a University official said.

An army truck with the loud hailers was at the Prameswara College junction near the Jaffna University campus. The army announcer urged passers by and students in Tamil not to sign the memorandum. ●

Central Bank Bomb Explosion Case

Mr. Andrew Somawansa High Court Judge of Colombo 12 February ordered to issue warrants on former OIC Pettah for failing to attend court without being excused, when the Central Bank bomb explosion trial resumed. The former Pettah OIC Chief Inspector Indu Karunaratne, is presently the HQI at Badulla police and a witness in the case.

In this case, 89 civilians were killed and charges had been framed on behalf of 79 identified victims, 1,313 persons were injured. 324 vehicles and 40 motorcycles were also damaged and the Central Bank building was destroyed exceeding Rs. 1,050 million as cost of damages.

The accused are indicted with conspiring to commit mischief to the Sri Lanka Central Bank building Colombo Fort, an offence punishable under Section 3 of the Prevention of Terrorism Act. According to the indictment the accused are charged under the PTA regulations on 13 counts including destroying the Central Bank building by using explosives and committing the murders of 78 people at the same time during the same incident and committing 88 other criminal acts between July 1, 1995 and January 31, 1996.

The accused were further charged with planning, conspiring and directing the said terrorist and violent activities along with Arulanathan alias Suresh and Selliah Raja Mohan (now deceased) in Vavuniya, Chavakachcheri, Kilinochchi and Colombo during the said period.

The ten accused listed by the Attorney General are Velupillai Prabhakaran alias Thambi alias Kirubakaram alias Karikalan alias Velusamy Putra alias Alpha (first accused), Siva Sankar alias Pottu Amman (2nd accused), Kandiah Jeewa Mohan alias Charles alias Charles Master (3rd accused), Wigneswaran Parinipan, alias "Siwa Samy", alias Gunaseelan (4th accused), Kadirgama Thambi Siva Kumar alias Ragu alias Ramesh Subramaniam Wigneswaran (5th accused), Seelaiaha Nawaratnam (6th accused), Rajadurai Sathurukulasingham (7th accused), Kandiah Sri Ganesh (8th accused), Ramiah Poopathy (9th accused) and Karupiah Kamalanathan (10th accused).

Most of the accused are being tried in absentia. Senior state counsel Sajeewa Samaranayake appeared for prosecution. Gamini Balasuriya and Joyce Mahadevan appeared for the defence. ●

UNP on Independent Commissions

The United National Party will soon put forward proposals in Parliament for an independent judicial service commission, an independent elections commission, an independent public services commission and an independent police commission. The UNP maintains that a Parliamentary Select Committee set up for this purpose by President Chandrika Kumaratunge, and chaired by Minister Rauf Hakeem is a joke and that the UNP will not be referring the proposals to this PSC.

The UNP submitted the draft proposals to the various political parties on 20 February. Both the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) and the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) have accepted the proposals in principle subject to any amendments the two parties would wish to make after a study of the document is concluded.

The UNP has set aside March 5, to discuss any amendments to the document. The JVP will make their suggestions, if any, on this day having consulted with the party's politbureau.

Sources within the UNP said the independence of these commissions would be ensured without any doubt by the implementation of a constitutional council

(continued on next page)

News Digest

● US AMBASSADOR VISITS EASTERN SRI LANKA

The US Ambassador for Sri Lanka, Ashley Wills, visited Batticaloa 14 February with the mission's Defence Attaché and its Regional Security Officer. The US embassy delegation held a two-hour discussion with SLA officers at the headquarters of the 23-3 brigade in Batticaloa town about the security situation in the district.

The delegation also met Air Force and Police officers of the region thereafter. The Ambassador later called on Mr. Joseph Pararajasingham, Tamil United Liberation Front MP for Batticaloa. Security was tightened in places the US delegation was expected to visit in the town.

The US Ambassador had discussions with Government Agent for the district, Mr. Mounagurusamy and representatives of the Non-governmental organisations working in Batticaloa to elicit their views on the human rights situation, rehabilitation and development work and the problems faced by the people in the region.

He met the local NGO's at Lake View Inn, a small hotel by the lagoon that has survived the ravages of the war in this underdeveloped east coast district. The mission's second secretary (political) and it political assistant arrived in Batticaloa on the previous day. They met government and NGO officials and had discussions with two senior local journalists as well. The embassy's Defence and Army Attaché, Lt. Colonel Frank L. Rindone was on a familiarisation visit to the district last year.

● COURT ORDERS USE OF TAMIL

The Trincomalee Magistrate on 14 February instructed the Police to file plaints and issue summons in the Tamil language in cases filed against Tamil speaking people. Mr.S.Thiagendran, Magistrate and Additional District Judge made the order when an Attorney-at-Law pointed out to him that his Tamil client had received summons in Sinhala language, contrary to the Section 44 (2) of the Criminal Procedure Act of 1979.

Defense Attorney Kasinathar Sivapalan told court according to the CPC Act, the defendant should be informed in a language he could understand. In the particular case P.Wijekanth of 'Thaen Thamil Veethi' of Orrs' Hill in Trincomalee had received his summons from the Police in the Sinhala language.

Attorney Sivapalan submitted to court that his client was unable to read or understand as the summons served on him was in the Sinhala language. He said that he was also not in a position to advise his client in this case due to the language barrier. He further submitted to court that the administrative language of courts in northeast province was Tamil.

Accepting the submissions, the Magistrate gave time till February 28 to the police to implement his instructions. Legal circles in Trincomalee expect that the Magistrate's instruction in this regard could make all police stations in Trincomalee district to make necessary arrangements to transact business in Tamil language also.

● INSCRIPTIONS REVEAL SRI LANKA LINKS

TIRUCHI: Recent excavations carried out in some ancient towns of the district have revealed existence of trade links between the region ruled by the Cholas and Sri Lanka as early as eight century A.D, according to a Tamil Nadu archaelogy department official.

Inscriptions showing the trade links were found in Deva Nagari script on a stone excavated recently at Kaliyampatti village near Musiri, an ancient port town, Director of Archaelogy A. Abdul Majid told a seminar on 'Facets of Hisotry' at a local colle-ge on 12 February in Tiruchi, South India.

The explorations were carried out by the department in Poompuhar, another famous port town in Cholas, along the coast of the State and certain pockets in and around Karur.

The inscriptions also showed that well-laid highways had existed in the region and revealed existence of trade ties with places like Maharasthra in the 10 century.

Majid said pucca road connections also existed between Palakkad in Kerala and Poompuhar. He said the explorations were continuing in the coastal areas around Poompuhar and interesting information was expected. He said his department had sent proposals to augment infrastructure facilities at the two recently installed museums at Karur and Gangai Konda Chozhapuram.

● VIJAYA ASSASSINATION: ASP REMANDED

An Assistant Superintendent of Police was remanded on 20 February by the Colombo Fort Magistrate and Additional District Judge, Priyantha Fernando, in connection with the disappearance of Tarzan Weerasinghe alias Herath one of the two main suspects in the Vijaya Kumaratunga assassination case. The ASP was remanded till March 2.

Inquiries revealed that Tarzan Weerasinghe and Lionel alias Gamini, arrested earlier by the CID in connection with the assassination, had disappeared from custody. Recently the CID took into custody a leading motor spares dealer and an employee of a private firm in connection with the Kumaratunga assassination. One of the suspects has been described as a former JVP member.

The two were arrested on a directive by Attorney General, K. C. Kamalasabeyson, PC. The two men are from Kirulapone, according to the police and at the time of being arrested, one had in his possession the bag which carried the weapon used in the Kumaratunga assassination.

These arrests are linked to the concealment of vital information on the assassination as well as aiding and abetting the main suspects in the killing.

(Continued from page 13)

which will in itself be an independent body. The main schedule of this document will cover 85 percent of the appointments to these commissions. The appointing authority for this schedule will be on the recommendation of the constitutional council.

The Chairman of the Constitutional Council will be Speaker, Anura Bandaranaikewhile Premier Rathnasiri Wickr-emanayake and Opposition Leader Ranil Wickremasinghe will be members. Five other members representing people of eminence and stature from civil society will also be chosen. Two of this five will represent the minority community. ●

● DIPLOMATS VISIT JAFFNA

Fourteen diplomats working in Sri Lankan missions abroad visited Jaffna on 16 February to assess the situation in the northern peninsula. They had discussions with the Government Agent for the district, local officials and the public. Meanwhile, the deputy chief of mission of the US embassy in Colombo was also in Jaffna along with two officials.

The US embassy officials met the GA at the Kachcheri and spoke to him about conditions in Jaffna. Kachcheri sources said that the US officials had inquired about the political situation in the peninsula and that the GA had told them that he was not in a position to discuss it because he is a 'government servant'.

However, he advised them to speak to the general public in Jaffna to ascertain themselves the real condition, according to the sources.

Meanwhile, Jaffna Kachcheri officials said that the visit of the 14 Sri Lankan diplomats arranged by the Sri Lankan Foreign Ministry in Colombo appeared to be aimed briefing them first hand in the peninsula to deal with issues regarding the ethnic conflict in the island raised by governments of the countries where they are posted now.

● GOVT LAUNCHES OP. HUMAN RIGHTS

In the backdrop of a lull in the battlefields, the Government has launched a new operation in the Jaffna peninsula - to solicit public complaints of human rights violations including disappearances.

In an unprecedented move, appeals are being made through the Jaffna-based Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation's Tamil beam, calling upon the public to register complaints with a CID team now stationed in the northern capital. During the first day of its operations, the special unit received 35 complaints from civilians in Point Pedro area. During its second day, in the Jaffna town, it received 43 complaints. The new move is prompted by allegations of human rights violations, particularly against security forces and po-lice in the north. Western Governments have placed pressure on the Government to expedite investigations and take action.

● STRUGGLE TO MAINTAIN FRONT

Representatives from Tamil political parties in the South who recently stepped up a campaign to lobby support for a peace process are split over issues in the north east and are finding it hard to maintain a common front.

The fragile alliance between the Tamil parties struggling to unite at least on the ethnic issue are fraught with dissension and dispute. Recent revelations that the EPDP, PLOTE and TELO are extorting money, from the people in the north, has resulted in the TULF pulling out of the uneasy partnership.

"Under this situation how can we all get together" V. Anandasangaree of the TULF lamented. He referred to the fact that the EPDP, PLOTE and TELO are not only collecting a salary from the Defence Ministry for helping Lankan troops fight the LTTE, but in addition are burdening the Tamil people of the North by extorting funds for various reasons.

The parties, which until recently were at each others throat, decided to unite on this issue to bring pressure on the government to positively respond to the unilateral ceasefire declared by the LTTE and to stop calling for the UK to brand the Tigers as a terrorist organization.

● DISPUTE OVER MONITORING TEAM

18 February - Norway's peace attempts in Sri Lanka have run into fresh trouble over the composition of an international panel to monitor a truce between government troops and Tiger rebels, a press report from Colombo said.

Oslo assembled the ceasefire monitoring team drawn from nine countries, including Britain and Japan, but, according to the report, the Sri Lankan government, the Tigers as well as neighbouring India had objected to some of them. Japan, which is Sri Lanka's largest single foreign aid donor, was expected to head the truce monitoring panel and finance its activities.

New Delhi has already denied the report that Britain and Japan being included in the team.

The report stated the Sri Lankan government too was against having a high representation of Western nations in the panel, fearing a backlash from nationalistic elements among the majority Sinhalese community. Equally, the LTTE had objections against to any country which was funding or arming the Sri Lankan government's military campaign.

● MOB ATTACK ON CHURCH

The government sent police to protect a Protestant church attacked by a mob during a service, and President Chandrika Kumaratunga ordered an inquiry into the disturbance.

Carrying clubs and swords, the mob attacked the Christian Center church on Sunday, 18 February, wounding 30 worshippers and damaging the building, said Godfrey Yogarajah, general-secretary of the National Christian Evangelical Alliance. Three victims were hospitalised.

Several dozen people were attending the service in the church in Nuwarawatte village, about 125 miles north-east of Colombo, the capital.

Police have taken three people into custody, said Kusumsiri Balapatabendi, secretary to the president. He said a special police team has been sent to the church to investigate and make sure there are no new attacks.

Christians make up about 7.6 percent of Sri Lanka's 18.6 million people. Buddhists are 69.3 percent, followed by Hindus at 15.4 percent. Muslims represent 7.6 percent. Christians belong to both the major ethnic groups - Sinhalese and Tamils. Despite 17 years of ethnic conflict, serious attacks on churches are fairly unusual.

However, Yogarajah said that Buddhist political groups have been showing displeasure with churches in the countryside, where Sinhalese Buddhists far outnumber Christians.

● CHEAP WEAPONS

February 24 - The civil war in Sri Lanka has led to a situation where the

cost of everything except firearms is skyrocketing, a retired police of ficial in Sri Lanka said in Colombo. Speaking at a seminar on the proliferation of small arms, a retired high level security official Tassie Seneviratne said the price of weapons had dropped drastically in Sri Lanka because corrupt police and security forces officers were selling pilfered arms and ammunition. He said that as a result of nearly two decades of war against separatist LTTE and earlier JVP uprising, weapons are easily and inexpensively available on the black market. A T56 rifle now costs fifteen thousand rupees while a hand grenade can be bought for a mere five hundred rupees. Some twenty thousand weapons have been issued to parliamentarians and their bodyguards over the years but only a fifth have ever been returned, Mr. Seneviratne further added.

● CABINET TOLD TO TIGHTEN BELTS

President Chandrika Kumaratunga has told her record 44-member cabinet to tighten their belts, allowing them the use of only eight vehicles and pruning their personal staff to 20 each. She said that ministers and junior ministers had to trim fuel and telephone expenses as well as take drastic cuts in unlimited transport and aides.

"It is the hope of the president that the ministers prove themselves illustrious leaders by strengthening the steps taken at this juncture when war expenditure is escalating," a report said. Politicians are reportedly already grumbling about the severe hardship the new regulations impose on them. The inordinate number of ministers and deputies appointed by Kumaratunga and the resulting burden on the exchequer caused much caustic comment after October's general election.

● DEPORTED SRI LANKANS TAKEN INTO CUSTODY

20 February - Twenty-three Sri Lankan Tamils, who had been duped by an emigration agent and abandoned in Kazakhstan, have been taken into custody by the police soon after they arrived at the airport in Colombo. According to police sources, the CID would investigate the group, hailing from Jaffna and including one Muslim for suspected links with the LTTE.

An agent who had promised to take them to Germany had left them close to Kazakhstan. They were taken into custody as illegal immigrants there. Later, they were served with deportation orders and sent back.

● BUILD-UP UNDER GUISE OF CEASEFIRE

February 22 - The Sri Lankan military has claimed that under cover of its so-called extended ceasefire, the LTTE was smuggling ammunition and fuel in large quantities, presumably for a resumption of hostilities.

It said that a gun battle in the early hours of on 21 February in Sri Lanka's Northern waters had revealed that the Tiger arms build up was continuing. The battle began when a Navy patrol intercepted a enemy cargo convoy and blew up two Tiger logistics boats off Jaffna's Point Pedro Harbour.

The naval engagement indicated that the Tigers were transporting ammunition and fuel to LTTE-held areas in the Mullaitivu jungles. The boat carrying fuel went to the bottom in a ball of fire. The other loaded with ammunition, exploded. Navy sources believe that the items were being smuggled from a foreign country.

The Navy also engaged two armed Sea Tiger craft escorting the logistics boats. The escort craft suffered extensive damage in the attack but escaped to the Mullaitivu area, after exchanging fire with the Navy. The attack inflicted heavy casualities among the Tigers, Navy sources said.

● PAKISTAN GIVES SRI LANKA $20

Pakistan has agreed to give a $20-million loan to Sri Lanka for purchase of military hardware, defence officials said ON 13 February in Colombo. The credit line was offered during a visit here earlier this month by Pakistan's army chief of staff Muhammad Yusaf Khan and head of military intelligence Ehsan Ul-Haq, officials said. Defence ministry spokesman Sanath Karunaratne said the terms of the loan were be ing worked out. Pakistan was one of the first countries Sri Lanka approached and responded in May last year to buy armaments when Tamil Tigers launched a major offensive aimed at taking the northern town of Jaffna.

● ATTAACK ON BALASINGHAM DENIED

Britain's New Scotland Yard on 13 February denied earlier reports that there had been an attack on the residence directed against the LTTE's theoretician and political advisor Anton Balasingham.

Conceding that there had been an incident, New Scotland Yard dismissed it as an incident of common vandalism and stated that several vehicles on the street near Balasingham's London residence had been damaged and that it was like any other incident of vandalism that occurs in London everyday. An earlier report in one of Sri Lanka's Sunday newspaper on 11 February, which was later picked up by some Indian news agencies, had said that "unidentified persons had invaded the premises of the Balasingham residence in the Greater London area and attempted to forcibly enter the house by trying to break down the front door on the night of Saturday February 3, at about 2.00 am.

● 600 POLICE, SERVICE PERSONNEL INDICTED

Attorney General K. C. Kamalasabayason has sent out indictments to the High Courts and instituted Criminal proceedings including non-summary cases against more than 600 police officers and armed forces personnel, senior departmental sources said recently. These indictments were followed the recommendations made by a committee appointed to look into disappearances up to 1994.

A special unit was set up in the Attorney General's Department to expedite investigations and institute criminal proceedings including non-summary cases against the personnel concerned. ●

Agitation Over Cost of Living Amidst Talk About War & Peace

Our Colombo Correspondent

UNP Agitation

Jubilant United National Party (UNP) leader Ranil Wickremesinghe gave on February 9 ultimatum to President Chandrika Kumaratunga and her Government to resign in March or face prolonged people's protest while the Government on the same morning unveiled a war budget that allocates a fifth of national expenditure and a fourth of the country's total income.

In London, on the same day, LTTE advisor Anton Balasingham told Norwegian peace negotiator his organization's disappointment about President Kumaratunga's rejection of their unilateral ceasefire and her determination to use Government's draft constitutional proposals as the basis for the discussion for a political settlement.

Enthused by the massive response his party's six-day trek, pada yatra, from Kandy to Colombo to protest against the escalation of the cost of living and bad governance Wickremesinghe declared: We will launch a massive protest campaign in March if the Government did not resign." The UNP is planning, it is learnt, a nationwide strike. It is also talking about asking the people not to pay the announced 25% fuel adjustment cost and the new water charge as part of its non-cooperation movement.

Pointing to the police personnel standing in a ring around the meeting ground at Town Hall he said: The President is really worried that we might march to the President's House. That is why she has posted all these policemen with water cannons around us. I tell her to rest for today. When I march to the President's House all these policemen with their water cannons and armed personnel with their deadly weapons will accompany me."

UNP, induced by the Philippine people's protest that toppled the president had named the Colombo March Jana Bala Meheyuma meaning People's Power Protest. UNP leaders are talking about a Philippine type of protest to topple President Kumaratunga from power.

UNP is keen in capitalizing on the soaring cost of living that had climbed 15% –20% since the January 23 Central Bank action to free float the Sri Lankan rupee in the foreign exchange market, which caused the rupee to slide around 12% against US dollar. Combined with higher oil prices transport cost went up. So were the prices of all essential commodities. Bus fare ascended 15%; rice, sugar, dhal, wheat flour, bread, milk powder, fish and even vegetables mounted by Rs. 3 to Rs. 5 a kilo. Electricity, water, telephone charges too soared by around 15%.

"The President has to resign. It is her wrong policies and faulty management of the economy that had heaped this entire burden on the people. While the people suffer her ministers are living in luxury," Wickremesinghe charged.

The 6-day trek that commenced at Getambe, Kandy around 10 am ran into rough reception on the third day when an armed gang fired at a group of UNP supporters killing one person. Posters appeared along the route of the march ridiculing Wickremesinghe as a clown and the march as the March to Eelam. That did dampen the spirit of the marchers and many deserted in fear. The momentum gathered again from the fourth day and a massive procession entered Colombo on the sixth day.

UNP gave the Government 3-months to enact legislation for the setting up of four commissions to enable the country to conduct clean and fair elections and to have an independent police, judicial and state services. The Government that had accepted in principle the need for the independence of judiciary, elections and public services is opposed to accord independence to the police service. Police should be under its control and direction, the Government maintains and had appointed a Parliamentary Committee under the chairmanship of Sri Lanka Muslim Congress leader and Shipping Minister Rauf Hakeem to consider the establishment of the independent commissions

UNP, JVP and the Tamil parties in the opposition had refused to participate in the deliberations of the Hakeem Committee charging it as a farce to delay the matter. UNP had announced its determination to place its own draft for the four independent commissions before parliament soon. Its constitutional experts have drafted the necessary bill and circulated it among the opposition parties to obtain their concurrence and table it as a joint opposition legislation. The draft bill has made provision for the appointment of the heads and members of these commissions by the President on the recommendation of the Constitutional Council, a 11-member body headed by Speaker of Parliament. Prime Minister, Opposition Leader, two parliamentarians representing other political parties, a retired Supreme Court Judge and five reputed persons from different walks of life would be the other members of the Constitutional Council.

The draft bill that would be tabled in Parliament as the 17th amendment to the present 1978 Constitution provides for the appointment of Supreme and Appeal Court judges, Attorney General, Auditor General, Ombudsman, Secretary General of Parliament, Heads of the three Services, Inspector General of Police, Governor of the Central Bank and the head of the Bribery and Corruption Commission by the President on the recommendation of the Constitutional Council.

The UNP which is trying to carry the JVP and Tamil parties in the opposition along with it had emulated the JVP in presenting a People's Petition to the President demanding an all round monthly pay rise of Rs. 3000 and the establishment of independent commissions. It is collecting one million signatures.

JVP Campaign

Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP-People's Liberation Front), the third largest political party, that staged a massive demonstration on January 8 handed a People's Petition signed by 1.2 million persons to the Presidential Secretariat on February 6.

JVP's January 8 protest and the petition contrasted the sufferings of the common man with Government's extravagance: world's largest 44-member cabinet, building of the Presidential Palace, President Kumaratunga's month- long holidaying in Europe. JVP demanded that the Government raise the wages of the workers by Rs. 7000 a month and pay Rs, 5 as an allowance per init in the cost of living index. Its meeting was disrupted by the police who used water cannons to disperse the crowd. JVP's 10-member strong parliamentary demonstrated inside the Parliament next day and declared that it cannot be suppressed any more. JVP trade union, Inter-Company Workers' Union, is currently busy educating the workers about a protest action to force the Government to grant the wage rise. They are planning a one- hour walk out.

JVP politbureau that met last week and decided to build up its agitation around three issues- cost of living, government extravagance and Norwegian peace efforts.

Cost of living had become unbearable since the second half of last year. According to the Department of Census and Statistics which compiles the Colombo Consumer's Price Index consumer prices rose by 6.2% in 2000 compared to the increase of 4.7% in 1999. This rise was mainly during the closing months of the year. The prices rose in December by 4.1% over November. This sharp increase in prices resulted in the prices in December being 10% higher than the prices the previous December. Situation worsened in January with the price hike of petroleum products and the free float of the Sri Lankan rupee.

The free float which liberalized the exchange rate in relation to the UD dollar permitted the market forces to determine the value of the rupee against the dollar. Earlier, since November 1977 the rupee was on managed float which economists call dirty float. Under that system the Central Bank managed the exchange rate by permitting the rupee to float within the limits determined by it. Financial circles said free float of the rupee was inevitable due to the soaring foreign exchange demand, dwindling foreign reserves and higher interest rates that has eroded investor confidence. The free float raised the exchange rate of the US dollar to Rs. 89-90 from Rs.82.

The Central Bank hopes to encourage exports and cut down imports and thus reduce the adverse balance of payments position. The International Monetary Bank (IMF) welcomed the Central Bank action as keeping to the reform agenda and called it timely. Trade chambers too chorused the IMF viewpoint saying free float will help correct the balance of payments position and aid conserve the dwindling foreign reserves. Dr. Howard Nicholas, in an address to Sri Lanka Economists Association painted a dismal picture, greater hardships for the economy and the people. He forecast worsening of the balance of payments position, shooting up of real inflation to 30%, budget deficit rising to 11% of the GDP, escalation of the interest rates and the slowing down of the GDP growth rate to 2.5% or less.

Central Bank economists disagree with Dr. Nicholas. They forecast 4.5% growth rate and 9% inflation. They say exports will rise by 10%, imports shrink, balance of payments position improve leaving a surplus of 100 million US dollars, budget deficit contained at 8.5% of the GDP and interest rates decline generating investor confidence.

Independent economists reject these estimations as unreal. They predict 3.5% growth and 15% inflation 10% –11%. budget deficit and interest rate of around 20%. They argue that current price increases will continue and the proposed removal of the administered prices through 25% fuel surcharge on electricity and water rate increases would again push the prices up.

War and Peace

Ronny de Mel, in a statement, said the only way to contain the cost of living rise is to end the war for which Rs. 83 billion was spent last year. Last year's budgetary allocation of Rs. 52 billion was enhanced by several supplementary estimates. This year the allocation has been raised to Rs.63 billion and if the war continued military spending will escalate.

Local and international peace lobbies are strongly pressurising the Government and the LTTE to end the war so that Sri Lanka would register rapid development. Current focus is on Sri Lanka's lost opportunities because of the 18 years of civil conflict Sri Lanka had been overtaken by all the new economic tigers due to the ethnic war. In 1960 Sri Lanka was economically better than Malaya, Singapore, Indonesia, Thailand and even South Korea. Now, Sri Lanka is sending investment promotion delegations to those countries seeking their investment.

"If the war continued, there is no hope for this country," said Jehan Perera, a top peace activist. His organization had commissioned a study about the costs of the war, direct and indirect, which revealed that Sri Lanka would have been among the economic tigers if peace and tranquility had prevailed in this Indian ocean island.

Sri Lankan business community led by the Joint Forum of Chambers was in the forefront last year on promoting negotiations between the warring Government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). Currently, it is backing the Norwegian sponsored peace initiative.

The peace process actively pursued by Norwegian special envoy Erik Solheim is moving forward, perhaps slowly. Solheim had a round of talks with LTTE advisor Anton Balasingham in London and with President Kumaratunga, Ministers Lakshman Kadirgamar and Prof. G. L. Peiris and Opposition Leader Ranil Wickremesinghe in Colombo. Following the two sessions of talks Foreign Ministry issued the following brief press release:

"President Kumaratunga together with Foreign Minister Lakshman Ka-

dirgamar received Mr. Erik Solheim, Special envoy of the Royal Norwegian Government and Ambassador Jon Westborg of Norway on 31st January. Further progress was made with regard to taking forward the ongoing Process of negotiation with the LTTE. In the meantime there will be no ceasefire as far as the Government is concerned."

The progress the news release mentions was with regard to the signing of the Memorandum that Norway wants the Government and the LTTE to sign as the first step towards the resolution of the ethnic tangle. Norway had urged the Government to remove the economic blockade it had clamped on the areas under LTTE control. The LTTE was asked to refrain from attacks on persons and property outside the north and eastern provinces. LTTE had accepted that precondition and had refrained from any such violent acts since it declared unilateral ceasefire on December 25.The fact that the Government had acknowledged the cessation of LTTE violence was proved by the relaxation of the extreme security measures it usually implements during independence day celebrations. No search was conducted, no new checkpoints put up or no additional troops or policemen were moved to Colombo during the 53rd anniversary of freedom on February 4. Balasingham had assured Solheim that their undertaking was solemn.

The delay in reaching the negotiation table is mainly due to the difficulties Government encounters. President Kumaratunga had vowed to the service chiefs that she would never agree to a ceasefire before some progress is achieved on a political formula for a solution to the Tamil problem. She had also unleashed the Sinhala chauvinistic forces led by Prime Minister Ratnasiri Wickramanayake who had made the Sinhala people believe that with superior, devastating weapons in their hand the army is on a winning way. She has also to satisfy the Buddhist clergy that is still living in the past talking of Sri Lanka as a Buddhist country.

President Kumaratunga is aware that she cannot continue the war. She told the nation in her Independence Day address that peace is essential for the people of Sri Lanka to enjoy the benefits of national independence. She is also conscious that the international community that rushed to her aid last May when LTTE threatened to capture Jaffna will not back her any more if she persists in continuing military action. She is also mindful of the war expenditure on the economy and the agitation building in the country owing to the unbearable rise in the cost of living.

She is now in a quandary. She has to satisfy Sinhala chauvinism and the security forces on the one hand and the international community headed by the donor nations in the other. With the prospect of the growing agitation about the cost of living war victory would be the only distraction available to the President/ But will the army provide her with a stirring string of victories, especially the recapture of Elephant Pass which it lost last April?

The heavy losses the army suffered when it ventured out into the LTTE held territory on January 16 had checked army hope recapturing Elephant Pass with its superior air and firepower. January 23 advance from Eluthumadduwal to Muhamalai was a night intrusion into areas not directly defended by the Tigers. Since then fighting had been limited to air and artillery attacks. Tigers have told Norway that they would resist any attempt by the army to advance towards Elephant Pass. "It would lead to the escalation of the intensity of the war," Balasingham had told Solheim. "It will be total war," LTTE political leader Tamilselvan had told Mannar Bishop Rayappu Joseph.

President Kumaratunga will find it difficult to shift from her declared stand that talks should move towards a political solution before ceasefire. She has proposed the Government's devolution proposals as the starting point for discussion. How far she could move forward from that position will be crucial for a solution. The international community has taken up the position that the aspirations of the Tamil people should be substantially satisfied. LTTE had been talking about Thimpu principles, the four principles four Tamil militant groups and the TULF formulated in 1986 at the Bhutan capital.

People of Jaffna and Batticoloa led by the Jaffna University Community and Independent Students Union of Batticoloa had clearly enunciated their aspirations as:

- Right to Self Government in their
- Traditional Homeland composed of the northern and eastern provinces enjoying
- Separate identity and
- Right of Self Determination

Balasingham has rejected the Government Devolution proposals as totally inadequate and as an attempt to impose the Sinhala Will on the Tamil people. Every Tamil party including coalition partner Eelam Progressive People's Party (EPDP) has rejected the Government proposals. They have suggested amendments to make the Government proposals acceptable to the Tamil people.

No peace talks unless ...

Extending its unilateral ceasefire for the third month, the Tamil Tigers announced on 22 February that they would enter peace talks only if the government reciprocated favourably.

They want the government to agree to a pre-talks cease-fire and to implement an Oslo-proposed memorandum of understanding (MoU) which, though not finally agreed between the parties, calls for establishing conditions of normalcy and ending an economic embargo in LTTE-held areas of northeast Sri Lanka.

In a statement issued from its London secretariat, the LTTE said they "were prepared to enter into peace negotiations when the Sri Lanka government reciprocates favourably to our unilateral declaration of cease-fire and agree to implement the Norwegian MoU aimed at the de-escalation of war and normalisation of civilian life."

The announcement indicated the Norwegian effort is still bedevilled by the government's and the separatists' stand on the truce.

Colombo has firmly refused to observe a cease-fire before talks begin and has said negotiations can proceed "with the full force of the war" going on. The LTTE have, however, insisted that the guns fall silent as a pre-condition to thrashing out a solution to their demand for a separate state.

The truce extension came two days before their second month-long ceasefire ended. The LTTE say they have strictly observed the truce in that time despite "provocative military operations by the Sri Lankan armed forces." The LTTE's statement said it was "sad

and disappointed that Sri Lanka has not yet responded positively to our peace gesture" and accused President Chandrika Kumaratunga of "modernising the armed forces with high-tech lethal weapons systems" which they alleged showed that she was "deeply committed to a military option."

The Tigers called on India, the U.S., Britain and other European nations to use their diplomatic good offices to urge Colombo to "abandon its destructive, militaristic approach."

The move came three days after the Tigers escaped being outlawed by new anti-terrorist legislation in Britain. Both the government and Tigers watched to see if London would announce a list of banned organisations on February 19, the day the law came into force. But the list is reportedly still under preparation.

The recent weeks have seen a lull in the fighting between government forces and the LTTE. The anticipated forward thrust by the military to capture Elephant Pass which fell to the Tigers in April last year has so not taken place.

Request Not to Ban LTTE

A coalition of some Tamil political parties in Sri Lanka have asked Britain not to proscribe the separatist Tamil Tigers in the interests of peace as a deadline for London's release of a list of outlawed rebel organisations drew near.

British high commission officials Colombo said the leaders of nine moderate Tamil parties and one Muslim party had met them on and urged that the LTTE be not included in the banned list.

The renewed pressure comes as the Sri Lankan government pushed for having the LTTE proscribed under Britain's new Terrorism Act 2000, a move that would be a diplomatic coup for Colombo and effectively stop the functioning of the LTTE's international secretariat in London.

The first part of a list naming the outlawed groups was expected to be released on or around February 19, a date which was watched eagerly in Colombo. The LTTE had warned that proscription in Britain would hamper Norway's ongoing efforts to open peace negotiations between the LTTE and the Sri Lankan government.

The Tamil parties asked the embassy to see that a letter from them appealing to the British prime minister to "resist all requests for a ban on the LTTE" was delivered to London.

It was the second time in recent weeks that the group, which included the Tamil United Liberation Front, the Tamil Eelam Liberation Organisation and the Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front, was meeting with the British officials.

They have also lobbying Colombo-based diplomats of countries like India, Japan, Australia, the US and member nations of the European Union.

A Tamil opposition member of parliament, P. Chandrasekharan of the Upcountry People's Front, has also appealed to the British envoy Colombo to desist from naming the LTTE as a banned group. ●

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The War and Floating the Rupee

Dr. S. Narapalasingam

Sri Lanka's balance of payments (the difference between the country's total payments and total receipts in the external account) came under increased pressure in the second half of 2000 and Sri Lanka's foreign reserves fell very low. The latter dropped to critically low levels of US$950 million by end 2000 compared to a comfortable US$2.5 billion, about two years ago. The Central Bank of Sri Lanka announced on January 23, hereafter it would not announce the buying and selling exchange rates of foreign currencies in advance as these would be determined solely by market forces. The commercial banks (foreign exchange dealers) would indicate the current market rates for the US Dollar (the intervention currency) and other foreign currencies. The Central bank would announce the weighted average exchange rates for the currencies as set by the market.

Earlier, the daily buying and selling rates of the US Dollar were determined by the Bank on the basis of the changes in the value of the dollar and the major currencies in the international markets and the local market conditions. It also participated in market operations to prevent sharp fluctuations in the daily exchange rates. Since June 2000, this band between the buying and selling rates was progressively widened to allow the market a greater role in determining the rate.

The increase in foreign capital inflows that followed the devaluation of the rupee in November 1977 and the subsequent managed float of the currency helped to continue the import liberalisation programme. This in turn promoted domestic investment, economic growth and exports. Tourist arrivals also increased considerably under the relative peaceful conditions that prevailed in Colombo and other popular tourist resorts. Migrant workers' remittances also increased significantly, as Sri Lankans lured by the high rupee value of the dollar went abroad for employment. The majority was women from poor families employed as housemaids in the Middle East.

The official exchange rate for one US dollar after stabilising at around Rs.40 during 1989-1991, has been increasing all through the 1990s reaching Rs.50 in 1993-1994 and Rs.68 in 1998. After reaching Rs.100 in the early days that followed the free float, exchange rate for the US dollar has come down now to around the 86-89 rupee level. The value of the Rupee has been declining continuously over the past several years. Rs.100 worth $3.25 in 1987, is now worth only about $1.15. The rupee depreciated against the dollar by 6.0 per cent in 1999 and 12.8 per cent in 2000. But in January 2001 alone, the rupee depreciated by almost 18 per cent.

The IMF has welcomed the free float of the rupee stating, "the new exchange rate arrangement is in keeping with the broader reform agenda of Sri Lanka to develop a more open, market-based economy". Since November 1977, the continued devaluation of the rupee has also been consistent with the same agenda. Why then the ensuing devaluation over more than two decades failed to restore some equilibrium in the balance of payments and the concomitant stability of the rupee?

Imports have been increasing by more than the expansion of exports, despite the currency devaluation. The excessive demand for imports, despite the high interest rates in the domestic money market has been largely due to the high private and public consumption. Although the average income of the households has increased over the years, the increase in imports for consumption has been influenced significantly by the few who have plenty of rupees acquired by various means. Some are legitimate as in the case of those earning or receiving foreign currencies or high income from profitable trade and investment. There are others who have been benefitting financially through various corrupt practices that have got entrenched in the public sector.

Even the President has said at a recent meeting with senior members of the public service that over 40 per cent of public funds allocated for development was consumed in wastage, inefficiency and corruption in the public service. Income from these illegitimate sources also has pushed up imports. It is well known that apart from tax evasion, there is considerable under reporting of incomes, which has deprived the government of the due tax revenue.

The enhanced official entitlements of ministers, deputy ministers, other legislators and their staff together with various facilities provided to them by the state increased the consumption expenditure, a sizeable portion requiring payments in foreign exchange. The entitlements of provincial council members have also placed additional demand for imports. The high oil import bill due to the sharp rise in the world market price for crude petroleum meant that more dollars have to be spent to import the much needed crude. The same applies to other essential imported commodities whose dollar prices increased recently. Then there is the high annual government expenditure on defence, which has a very high import content. Foreign aid is not available for financing these imports.

Between 1977 and 1986 defence spending increased by 800 percent from Rs. 750 million to Rs. 6 billion. In 1983 when the ethnic conflict erupted into a bloody war, the defence spending was just Rs. 1.3 billion. This increased to Rs. 34 billion in 1995 (the original estimate was Rs. 24 billion - $ 444 million), which was more than forty times the amount spent in 1977. It increased to Rs. 46 billion in 1996 (original estimate was Rs. 38 billion - $ 707.7 million), a 35 percent increase on 1995. In 1997 as compared with the original allocation of Rs. 44 billion, the actual military expenditure was Rs. 46.6 billion. In 1998, the original allocation of Rs. 44 billion was later increased to Rs.

56.2 billion. The original estimates of military expenditure for 1999 and 2000 were Rs. 47 billion and Rs. 52.4 billion respectively. The budgeted defence expenditure for the current year is Rs. 63 billion, an increase of 21 percent from last year's allocation. The amount allocated for the Army is Rs. 29.2 billion; the Navy is Rs. 8.3 billion; the Air Force is Rs. 10.7 billion; and the Police Department is Rs. 12.4 billion.

IMF's reliance on devaluation as a solution to Sri Lanka's balance of payments problem has been criticised by other Sri Lankan economists. As long as imports grow by amounts that are beyond the capacity of the country to pay for them, the past trend of continued devaluation will remain until the point is reached when the high cost of living becomes unbearable for the vast majority, compelling them to challenge the political system. The threat to peace will come from the very people who are now anxious to see normalcy and peace restored early in the country.

The only way to prevent such a calamity is to reduce drastically government military and wasteful expenditures which have been responsible for the high imports and the balance of payments problem. According to the Appropriation Bill presented in Sri Lanka Parliament, nearly one-fifth of the total government expenditure in 2000 was for defence. Defence spending has now exceeded the combined outlays on education and health.

A study on the Cost of the War undertaken by Marga Institute found the total war cost for 1996 to be more than three times the direct budgetary expenditure on defence. If an early political settlement of the ethnic conflict is reached, it is possible to change the present import pattern drastically with the help of foreign aid and also expand exports. Imports needed for reconstruction and development will be financed largely through foreign aid that is withheld now. It will also help to focus on other pressing problems afflicting the people. These have intensified through neglect by the authorities for various reasons not all connected to the situation created by the protracted war. ●

The Return of Terror?

Laksman Gunasekara

The old-stagers of the UNP terror-squads must be unhappy. Their legendary terror is being up-staged. A new kid is in town and Ranasinghe Premadasa himself would be watching with a critical eye from below (he surely couldn't be 'above'?) the new style of bheeshanaya(terror) by Vijaya Ranabahu.

Mr. Ranabahu, is the self-styled 'Commanding Officer' who has signed the statement faxed by the mysterious new 'National Front Against Tigers' (NFAT) claiming responsibility for the recent bomb attack against the OXFAM offices in Colombo. That venerable British charity is yet reeling from the two grenades flung at its compound in Colombo at about 2 a.m. on January 31.

The Government has been correct to very quickly condemn this very nasty action which did not kill or injure anyone since it was done in the early hours, but nevertheless served to terrorise that organisation as well as numerous other agencies which have operations responding to the immense social crisis caused by the war. The Government has been equally correct to describe this action by the NFAT (non-fat?) as a "terrorist" action, although, judging by the care taken by the NFAT to strike at a moment when the offices were empty of people, it does seem a kind of 'soft' terrorism.

There we have the perennial ethical dilemma : just as much as soft-porn being 'soft' does not make it non-pornographic compared with 'hard-core porn' (if one goes along with current definitions of 'porn'; I prefer erotica), 'soft-terror' is nevertheless 'terror', or to use the late President Ranasingha Premadasa's evocative jargon, 'bheeshanaya'.

Whether Ranasingha or Ranabahu, the actions of deliberate violence against non-combatants - whether grenade-throwing or 'disappearances' or death squad massacres - serve to arouse terror among the populace. Ranasingha's masterful innuendo was such that Sri Lankans were excruciatingly uncertain at all times whether his 'bheeshanaya' rhetoric was referring to the Deshapremi Janatha Viyaaparaya's (DJV) murder of its civilian opponents or to the much larger scale slaughter by the mysteriously unidentifiable pro-government death squads (like the Green Tigers, Yellow Cats, Scorpions, PRRA et al). Ranabahu's prose has yet to take effect.

His actions, even if a laudable 'soft' terror, do have their effect.

Although the Police are dismissive of speculation over this appearance of a new 'terrorist' group, the actions and the rhetoric do hint at the emergence of something long anticipated: an armed group using violence to promote the cause of Sinhala ultra-nationalism. This is something these columns warned against over a year ago (see my column headlined 'Are the Sinhala ultra-nationalists arming?', Sunday Observer of January 16, 2000).

This is the third time the NFAT label has been stamped on an armed action.

The first time, in connection with the assassination of ACTC leader Kumar Ponambalam, the use of the NFAT label was not convincing amid the more credible speculation that Mr. Ponnambalam's killing was an LTTE action to remove a political irritant. But the second time, in connection with the grenade attack against the Norwegian Save the Children charity offices in Colombo, the NFAT label was taken more seriously.

The OXFAM grenade attack also seems to fit a pattern. Most significant is the 'soft' aspect of these two armed actions. The Vijaya Ranabahu's NFAT, in striking at times when people are not in the targetted area, seems to demonstrate a humane concern to only intimidate and not actually take people's lives or physically injure people. This is in stark contrast to Ranasingha Prem-

adasa's horrific bheeshanaya and Keerthi Vijebahu's DJV insurgency. Ranabahu seems intent on non-lethal armed propaganda in support of the Sinhala ultra-nationalist cause.

Rather than pun on this 'Rana - runner' (running from whom?) aspect of these various and nefarious Sinhala warriors, I wish to emphasise the seriousness of such armed actions that, even if non-lethal, can only serve to harm the Sinhala ultra-nationalist as well as the Sinhala nationalist political movements. This kind of violence that deliberately targets civilians can only serve to discredit the cause of those perpetrating it.

Any anti-Tiger Front that resorts to armed actions, should target the Tigers. After all, the Tigers themselves began their armed struggle, as a genuine 'handful' (to use the term the late J.R. Jayewardene employed to scoff at them) of barefoot guerillas (most of the Tigers are still barefoot even today) but yet targetted the Sri Lankan police and armed forces.

While even in the early stages of its insurgency the TNT-LTTE did target some Tamil civilian political figures, the majority of its targets were military or para-military (police) ones. For years, while the various Tamil militant separatist groups had only the infantry weapons stolen from the Sri Lankan forces and a few assault rifles smuggled in, they continued to take on the Sri Lankan armed forces.

In the case of the NFAT, the strategy seems to be in line with the civilian Sinhala ultra-nationalist movement's politics of opposing those who want to make peace with the Tamil armed separatist movement and reform the Sri Lankan state to bring equality to all ethnic communities. The emphasis of

the Sinhala Ultras has always been on opposing the peace and, in doing so, they will end up having to oppose many Sinhalas - the vast majority of Sinhalas, in fact - who want a civilised and dignified resolution to the conflict. Will the Ultra's campaign end with violence by Sinhalas against Sinhalas in a holocaust of a scale that even Premadasa failed to engineer?

(Courtesy: Sunday Observer, 11.2.2001)

Tamil Times at Twenty

A Credible and Powerful Voice

Silan Kadirgamar, Colombo

In these times and age when the birth and demise of publications in the print media is far too frequent, the survival of a periodical for twenty years is a matter for pride and a sense of achievement. It is doubly significant for a periodical concerned with the turbulent, intensely violent and complex conflict in Lanka to have survived without interruption for two decades. The national question in Lanka and the controversies surrounding it evoke intense passions, deep hatreds and partisan loyalties. The Tamil Times has survived all these with distinction.

The unprecedented violence that has taken place in these years has transformed a once stable Tamil community deeply rooted in the island of Lanka, particularly in the northeast, into a people on the run. The Tamil Diaspora is now a reality constituting more than half-a-million spread over twenty countries.

The **Tamil Times** has come to stay as a credible and powerful voice reflecting the fears and aspirations of the Tamil people, though not exclusively that of the Tamils alone. As a regular reader in the early years and subsequently a consistent subscriber from 1983 one wishes to extend congratulations to those who came out with the idea of the **Tamil Times** and made it a reality.

Much of the credit without doubt goes to editor Rajanayagam who takes his place among the few distinguished, courageous and outstanding journalists committed to peace with justice in Lanka. He occupies a special place among those who have unwaveringly stood for democratic and human rights. With sturdy independence his has been the unenviable task of steadfastly upholding values that are permanent and universal in the context of ethnic conflict in which unquestioned loyalty to the ethnic group to which one belongs is demanded, and the failure to oblige is deemed trecherous.

His efforts would not have borne fruit without the support and hard work put in by journal's founder Manger Mr C J Thamotharam, and Mr.N.S. Kandiah who succeeded him in 1988 and made the **Tamil Times** viable financially without depending on funding and patronage from extraneous sources. His own commitment and personal integrity has made it possible for the editor of **Tamil Times** to adopt an editorial policy that has won for it the admiration and support of its readers.

It would not be out of place at this point to draw attention to the fact that both editor and manager were nurtured in the ideals and traditions espoused by the distinguished educationist, Principal Subramaniam (affectionately and popularly known as Orator) of that remarkable institution Skandavarodaya Collęge in Chunnakam, Jaffna, in the mid-decades of this century. Orator was, it may be recalled a founding member of the anti-imperialist Jaffna Youth Congress of the 1920s and 30s.

The conditions to which the Tamils of Lanka have been reduced, call for continuing advocacy of our human and democratic rights and exposure without fear, of the plight into which the Tamil people have been driven into. The infrastructure constituting roads, bridges, transportation, electric power-supply and telephone communications have been reduced to a primitive state in the Northeast. Several schools, hospitals, temples, churches, shops and markets have been totally or partially destroyed. Thousands of houses have been demolished or rendered uninhabitable.

Building a house for the family has been a cherished dream of every family in Lanka. In Lankan society, be it in the south or the north, we rarely buy and sell houses - we virtually build them purchasing and transporting every single stone, tile and piece of timber.

The structure that is the house is transformed into a permanent home that becomes very much a part of our lives in which are enshrined the dreams and aspirations of parents, children and their children passed on from generation to generation. In addition houses constitute the socio-economic wealth of a people into which goes practically the totality of the family's savings. Pictures and video-clippings of the near total destruction of that vibrant town Chavakachcheri and its toll in deaths, displacement and human suffering has brought tears to many a present and former citizen of Jaffna, more so to those of us who were born and bred in the salubrious environment of that wonderfully homely place. And Chavakachcheri is only the latest victim of such havoc that began in 1977.

For twenty years **Tamil Times** has placed on record this tragic history of the Tamils. It remains a valuable periodical of record, unrivalled by any other single publication of contemporary times. **Tamil Times** has evolved into a periodical that not only gives us the news, it is also one that provides readers with learned articles by reputed scholars. This mix of news, credible record of events, and scholarly articles gives **Tamil Times** a respected and permanent place among publications focusing on the crisis in Lanka. It is free of overstatement and shallow propaganda. Nor does it lend it's space to 'spin doctors', to use an expression that has become commonplace in the context of today's politics of western countries. These standards in journalism need to be cherished, given the utmost importance and nurtured in the contemporary world.

Tamil Times in some ways may be compared to the **'Lanka Guardian'** edited by Lanka's distinguished journalist the late Mervyn de Silva. It was a fortnightly that provided us with a range of commentaries on the news, and news analysis from men and women from a broad spectrum of Lankan society. Mervyn de Silva relished keeping the columns of the **Lanka Guardian** open for conflicting opinions and debate within clearly defined parameters, without sacrificing the high standards of journalism that he maintained to the end. Like **Tamil Times** it provided space for scholarly articles as well. Founded in 1977 Lanka Guardian ceased publication two years ago. **Tamil Times** together with the **Lanka Guardian** constitutes and will continue, in the years to come, to be necessary reading for those seeking to understand contemporary Lanka and its sad history.

At this time it is worth reminding ourselves of the great tradition in print journalism that the Tamils of Sri Lanka have inherited. It is a rare achievement in Asia for such a numerically small community as the Ceylon Tamils. This began in 1841 with the Christian weekly the **Morning Star** (Udaya Tharakai in Tamil) established by the American Ceylon Mission. With the founding in 1947 of the Jaffna Diocese of the Church of South India the Morning Star came under its management. Other publications with religious affiliations followed in the nineteenth century. These were the **Catholic Guardian** (Pathukavalan) founded in 1876 and the **Hindu Organ** in 1889 (Hindu Sadanam). Though controlled by religious bodies these three weeklies, all bilingual, provided news and comment on political, cultural and other issues. The first full-fledged secular paper to appear outside Colombo was the **Ceylon Freeman** (in English) founded in Jaffna in 1862. It did not last long and was succeeded by the **Ceylon Patriot** (also in English) in 1863 and continued right into the early 1930s. The **Catholic Guardian** and the **Hindu Organ** ceased publication sometime in the 1980s.

Proclaiming as its maxim *"Righteousness Exalteth a Nation but Sin is a Reproach to any People"*, a Biblical exhortation particularly apt for our times, the **Morning Star** remains the only publication in Lanka to have been continuously published to this day. The Colombo based **Observer** founded in 1834 was the oldest but ceased publication recently. The Jaffna based **Morning Star** has survived the war. It no doubt appeared in fits and starts at times of total disruption by violent conflict but has demonstrated a sturdy will to survive. This is no doubt due to the resilience of the institutional Church and a few dedicated persons.

Taking their place among the oldest publications in Asia, the above weeklies are valuable sources of information, comment and discussion on a broad spectrum of issues in the nineteenth century and in the first half of the twentieth century. Their usefulness as newspapers ceased with the rapid growth of the Colombo press. As the circulation of the daily newspapers from Colombo increased island wide the Jaffna weeklies ceased to have importance as sources of news and gradually became sectarian catering to a diminishing and narrower readership. The publication of the **Eelakesari** (Tamil weekly from the late 1920s to 1958) and the subsequent founding of the **Eelanadu** (Tamil, 1959 to late 1980s) as the first daily newspaper to be published outside Colombo further reduced the circulation of the traditional weeklies. Nevertheless from a historical perspective they remain extremely important as sources of information, and remain valuable cultural treasures of the country, especially of the Tamil people in particular.

We have seen the birth and demise of numerous other publications mostly in Tamil and some in English from the late nineteenth century to contemporary times. Several were organs of political parties and movements. It is time that urgent steps are taken to record and preserve all these before they are lost forever. The initiative for this task must come from the Tamils abroad with the support of concerned international organisations. Records should be made available in microfilm or other format in Jaffna, Colombo and abroad. This is a vital task that has got to be addressed and worth focusing on even as we observe this important anniversary.

The conflict and its consequent excessively brutal violence we have witnessed in our own country bring out the worst and best in human beings. The war with the introduction of heavy artillery and weapons has degenerated into a "War Without Mercy" (to quote the title of a highly acclaimed book written about the war between Japan and the United States). To have faithfully recorded these events without fear or favour, without rancour or bias and with a sense of responsibility is the hallmark of a civilized and cultured fraternity. **Tamil Times** belongs to that which is best in people be they Tamils or of any other ethnic identity. We take pride in your having reached twenty with honour and wish you well in the years to come in your relentless search for peace with justice. ●

Tamil Times as a Mediator

Dr Jehan Perera

The winding up of the **Lanka Guardian** fortnightly magazine in Sri Lanka two years ago after more than 25 years of publication is a pointer to the continuing relevance of the ***Tamil Times***. There must be the need and there must be the human resources. ***Tamil Times*** survives because there is the need for a journal that will publish a spectrum of analytical and critical views on the ethnic conflict, while excluding the viciously partisan. ***Tamil Times*** survives because it has the much needed human resources, albeit very very limited in both personnel and material terms, in the form of its editor P Rajanayagam, and manager Mr N S Kandiah. By way of contrast, the Lanka Guardian ended its days because the need for it was taken away by changed circumstances. But still it survived until the man was no more, shortly after its editor and publisher, Mervyn de Silva passed away.

The **Lanka Guardian** began its life during the height of media repression under the United Front government of 1970- 77 which nationalised the larger part of the privately owned press. The Lanka Guardian was published on a small scale. It was a small business venture and Mervyn de Silva did not have any other commercial interests that the government could have taken its revenge against. The Lanka Guardian focussed on national political issues, including the ethnic conflict. But its main area of concentration was mainstream politics. When the laws governing media reporting and ownership were relaxed, and newspapers such as Ravaya and the Sunday Leader began their investigative reporting, the need for a mainstream news magazine became numbered.

But there continues to be another type of need, that of representing the spectrum of moderate and well informed views regarding the ethnic conflict, and that is the one that ***Tamil Times*** continues to fill and its editor Rajanayagam excels in, as a mediator. Although not generally thought about in this manner, journalists are really conflict specialists, who spend much of their time describing and interpreting behaviors of individuals and groups in conflict. Journalists can be compared to mediators in the following way. They both begin by analysing the conflict. They have to report the facts and get the facts accurately, while putting them into a context. Both journalists and mediators should restrain their inclination to take sides. They both can provide a forum for debate and exchange of views and give the parties in conflict a chance to air their views. They both can educate the parties to the conflict by challenging stereotypes and reframing issues. This is what ***Tamil Times*** has been doing to the discomfiture of the impassioned and one-track advocates of nationalist causes. It has been a mediator speaking to the two sides of a divided country and its expatriate population.

A part of the reason for the lack of constructive media reporting on the Sri Lankan ethnic conflict is the government's media policy that has, for several years now, prevented journalists from going over into the conflict zones and reporting the situation at first hand. At present the situation in Sri Lanka is that all roads and means of transport to the conflict zones are blocked off by the armed forces who will not permit persons through unless they have clearance. It is difficult for independent journalists to obtain that clearance. But even if they do, they face another hurdle on the other side of the divide. The LTTE also does not encourage independent journalism that might reveal the iron hand by which they control the population and recruit youngsters to their fighting brigades. One journalist who visited the battle-zones of the north-east and Wanni called it the "heart of darkness."

Generally, journalists are only permitted to go into the conflict zones by the government in a group. They are sent on whistle-stop visits for a few hours, where they do not have the time to really get to know what people are thinking and what the situation really is. This restriction on access to the north-east is coupled with a censorship that prohibits the media from reporting military action independently, in addition to prohibiting revelations of military procurements and plans. Therefore, what the media prints or broadcasts as news from the front are generally handouts of the Sri Lankan defence ministry. These will necessarily give a one sided picture of the prevailing situation. It is ironic therefore that the average Sri Lankan television viewer is able to see live coverage of wars in other countries but not his or her own.

The problem of governmental and LTTE control over the flow of information regarding the war is aggravated by the fact that the Sri Lankan media both within and outside the country is ethnically biased. One-sided and mono-ethnic reporting tends to be the norm. The news coverage in the Sinhala and Tamil languages invariably look at the same story from totally different angles and frequently not covering at all what is carried in the other language media. Unfortunately, even the English language news media, which is read or listened to by members of both the Sinhalese and Tamil communities, engage largely in mono-ethnic reporting which depends on the ethnic composition of the ownership of the media organisation. This is the pitfall that ***Tamil Times*** has avoided.

Finally, as a personal tribute to Raja, I have enjoyed his company and his conversation, both in London and in Colombo. He is an earnest and passionate man, willing to make his lonely way through life, in a foreign land, where it is so important to be a part of a larger community. But he has been prepared to give up that sense of comfort to belong to the minority who are willing to stand up and be counted - for democracy, balance, self criticism and accommodation even in a time of war. Best of luck for another 20 years, when hopefully he will be writing on economic development, and not on conflict resolution. ●

Two Decades of Tamil Times

Rajan Philips, Canada

January is the month of optimism with hopes for the best in the new year. For the Tamils, it is also the month of the traditional harvest celebration, the *Thai Pongal*. An auspicious time indeed to congratulate the ***Tamil Times***, its indefatigable editor from inception, Mr. P. Rajanayagam, and its publisher-supporters over the years, for completing twenty years of continuous publication.

When ***Tamil Times*** first appeared in 1981, Jaffna was still tottering in the aftermath of the brutal emergency rule imposed by J.R. Jayewardene. "Eliminate the menace of terrorism in all its forms from the island and more specially from the Jaffna District" was Jayewardene's pompous decree, in 1979, to his cousin and commander, Brigadier Weeratunga. To squeeze twenty years of ensuing trauma into a single sentence, the Jayewardene/Weeratunga intervention in Jaffna was a disastrous failure and a harbinger of even more disastrous and permanent damages to the peninsula and the island, by Jayewardene, his successors, and their self-deterministic adversaries.

Tamil Times began as the first journal, without any direct or indirect affiliation to Tamil political organisations or individuals, to present the Tamil case among Sri Lankans and to that very small part of the world that is interested in Sri Lankan affairs. For twenty years, amidst the confused cacophony of other drivels that appear and disappear with predictable regularity, ***Tamil Times*** has remained the only journal consistently presenting the Tamil case with independence, credibility and impartiality. Its most remarkable achievement has been in presenting the Tamil case against majority chauvinism without lapsing into minority chauvinism and the politics of narcissism. More positively, thanks to the world-view of its editor, ***Tamil Times*** has always grounded its case for the Tamils on the universal premises of democracy, tolerance, self-criticism, and, most of all, genuine humanism.

Surviving as an independent political journal with a Voltairian motto has its own challenges in any situation, but infinitely more so when most of the Tamil expatriates are hostile to the Sri Lankan government and the mainstream Sri Lankan media mischievously presents criticisms of the Tamil groups by the ***Tamil Times*** or any other Tamil, as the latter's support of the government's unilateral terms of a political solution. To its credit, ***Tamil Times*** has weathered the storms from within and without, and the need for this journal to continue and grow is as strong today as was its reason to appear twenty years ago. Politics aside, and besides being the journal of record of individual achievements and life-cycle events of the Tamils, it should also play the role of a critical social mirror of the Tamil diaspora. The role and the usefulness of the ***Tamil Times*** will be doubly enhanced if it can be published in English and Tamil simultaneously. ●

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Letter from Jaffna

Dear Periya Anna

Now we are again in trouble. We have to decide soon whether to return to our Pasaiyur house or to continue to live at Nallur. Mother wants to return but sister is adamant that we should stay on in Nallur. Both are correct in their own way. Mother is scared that if we don't return soon people will remove even the cement blocks in the wall. Sister is reluctant to leave this comfortable house with tiled toilet and piped water.

I am torn asunder by these two. I sleep at Pasaiyur and cycle to Nallur for meals. Last Wednesday night, February 7, a funny thing happened. I heard a noise on the roof. I slowly crept out of the back door and flashed the torchlight. What did I see? A man was removing our tiles. I picked a stone and threw at him. He replied by throwing a tile at me. Fortunately I ducked. Otherwise it would have hit my head. From uncle John's house these people have removed the entire roof and are now busy removing doors and windows.

You may wonder why these things are happening now? The army announced two weeks ago that Gurunagar, Pasaiyur, Eechamoddai and parts of Colombothurai are safe for resettlement and all displaced to Kopay should return. They have threatened to cut the dry rations if they fail to do so. So, many people are returning with the cadjan sheds built for them by Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs). They are using those materials to put up sheds in their compounds.

Some are busy repairing their houses. In most of the houses roofing tiles or asbestos sheets are broken. They are stealing them from vacant houses. The army is encouraging them to so. It wants the people to return to their houses. Pasaiyur market has begun to function from Saturday. The army had vacated the building. The army has also vacated St. Anthony's Vidyalaya premises and the school reopened on February 5. Attendance is still poor. Mass is being held at St; Anthony's Church from February 4,

With the return of the displaced Jaffna's new cottage industry, *kassipu* distillation has spread to the coastal belt. Our people, with their knack for invention and improvement, had developed new brands that give the kick with low intake.

Some NGOs ran pre-schools for displaced children in different parts of Kopay. With the return of the displaced those pre-schools have been closed and the generous managers have removed the tables and chairs to their homes for safekeeping!

I forgot to mention earlier the thrilling experience we had on Thursday, February 8.Around 11 am there were explosions along the sea beach. The ear-bursting blasts continued till midday. There was panic all round. Some fell on the ground and others sought refuge behind walls and buildings. Mary *mami* bravely shouted to her children to get ready to return to Kopay. It was army practice. They practiced repelling Tigers if they try to land on the beach. That was army's confidence building activity.

You might be aware that lawyer Raviraj had taken oaths as the new mayor of Jaffna. He had been the acting Mayor since Sivapalan was killed. TULF's senior vice president V. Anandasangari was also present at the swearing ceremony. They are now very very worried. Not because of the LTTE or anything like that but because of their new found friends, PLOTE and TELO.

These armed groups are in the recently formed Group of Eleven Tamil Parties. Anandasangari was reluctant to join that group. He agreed to join it for the sake of Tamil unity. And that had helped the Tamil cause. Now, he is worried about TULF's image. "Our name will be tainted," he moans. PLOTE and TELO are now accused of collecting taxes and demanding funds from traders. Traders, as usual, had passed that burden on to the consumers. TULF had requested both groups to refrain form doing so.

PLOTE fund collectors have told traders that they need money to run their outfit. "It's not extortion but contribution," PLOTE is saying but traders state that the tone of the request was more demanding than appeal. Abductions have not begun in Jaffna but there is a general fear that that is not far away. TELO says that it receives no support from the government and has to rely on the people for its sustenance. A statement issued by its leadership avers that they never compel anyone but call for aid when circumstances force.

Army has come to know about these activities and has warned traders not to give money to anyone. They have also told traders to inform them if anyone approaches them for funds. This has naturally annoyed both groups. A TELO fundraiser has told some traders that that was none of army's business. Traders are helpless. Some of then have already handed their contributions to fund collectors.

Let me conclude this letter by pinpointing some of the disturbing trends now surfacing in Jaffna peninsula. First, the leaflet culture. A number of anonymous leaflets are now in circulation. The one signed, Tamil Eela Reformists, attacked EPDP and its leader personally, in an undignified manner. Language used was vile. The second leaflet was signed, Jaffna peninsula people. It contrasts EPDP's earlier policies with the current and the past life of its leader with the present. The third leaflet, We Praise and Bless You, is a sa-

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tirical piece, highly entertaining to the reader.

Second, the Statement War. Currently, it is on between the EPDP and TELO. In a statement, EPDP accused the media for its failure to identify the two groups engaged in extortion. By using phrases like "armed groups." "forces that help the army" media is doing disservice to the other armed groups. The statement identified TELO as one of the groups but was silent about the other. It was commented adversely by the media. EPDP did not want to mention PLOTE because of the close relationship that exists between the leaders of both groups.

TELO replying in a statement commented critically about the activities of the EPDP. Local EPDP leadership then joined the fray by issuing their statements. Jaffna papers decided at that stage to discontinue publication of these statements.

Then, the statement war spilled into parliament. On February 8, when the government motion to extend the state of emergency was debated Anandasangari said the issue of passenger tickets who travel to Trincomalee by ship is a mess after the EPDP took it over. EPDP's T. Thavarajah retorted that Anandasangari was reading a TELO statement.

Third, misbehaviour of armed cadres. Recently, armed cadres reportedly from EPDP camp in Karaveddy went to the house of a married women. They told her husband that she was wanted for questioning in the camp. They prevented the husband from accompanying her. She took her children along with her. The three men, one of them was married recently, raped the woman in the presence of her children. Two of them had been arrested. The third was absconding.

Armed men are also intimidating pressmen and the public. The latest was the intrusion of two armed men into the house of a journalist, the correspondent to the weekly, Valampuri. They fled when the family members of the journalist raised alarum.

Fourth is the welcome trend in human rights protection. There are two aspects to it. The first is the commencement of inquiry by the Human Rights Commission into the complaints made to it by Jaffna residents. The other is the decision of the Jaffna University Community to set up a Human Rights Centre to educate the people of human rights, to assist the people to make complaints to the relevant authorities about incidents of human rights violation and help the people to secure available remedies.

Now, tell me what we should do? Should we go back to our house or not?

Loving younger brother
Anthony

Tamil Virtual Varsity

February 17 - The Tamil Nadu Government's ambitious project to spread Tamil language and its culture through the Internet achieved fruition today, with the Chief Minister, Mr. M. Karunanidhi, inaugurating the Tamil Virtual University (TVU).

"The State in the last four years has been in the forefront of industry and information technology sector growth. In the recent past, the TIDEL Park and the Ennore Port were inaugurated and the foundation stone laid for the massive Nanguneri special industrial zone. Now, I am happy that information technology is being used to spread Tamil globally to benefit the large Tamil diaspora," Mr. Karunanidhi said. He expressed the hope that the TVU would be an instrument for integrating the 75 millions Tamils living in 40 countries.

He recalled the steps the government had taken to form experts groups to implement the announcement he made in TamilNet 1999 of the government's intention to establish the TVU. The establishment of the TVU in two years, he said, was a symbol of victory for the government efforts in this direction.

"The DMK government has always lived by the guiding principle that even if we were to fall, Tamil should live on. The TVU is a symbol of our commitment to Tamil."

Mr. Murasoli Maran, Union Minister for Industry and Commerce, who presided wanted the TVU to concentrate on promoting modern, scientific Tamil. "Please leave the ancient texts and hard grammar to scholars and concentrate on aspects such as short term courses for tourists and visitors." He lamented that Tamils living outside the State were giving more importance for growth of Tamil computing. He lauded Dr. V. C. Kulandaiswamy, Chairman, TVU, Dr. M. Ponnavaikko, its Director, and Dr. M. Anandakrishnan, a member of the governing Board and the Chief Minister's I.T. Advisor.

The Education Minister, Mr. K. Anbazhagan, and the Minister for Tamil Development and Culture, Dr. M. Tamizhkudimagan, said the TVU would address the concerns of Tamils living abroad about the fall in cultural traditions among the younger generation. The Internet-based learning centre would definitely help the Tamils revive their symbols of culture.

Mr. I. Gunawardane, Sri Lanka's Minister for Higher Education and I.T., Mr. S. Sivathasan, Chairman, Official Languages Commission of Sri Lanka, spoke on the ties between Tamil Nadu and Sri Lanka over the ages and the steps now being taken there for Tamil development. Mr. Arun Magizhnan of Singapore and Mr. Muthu Nedumaran of Malaysia, who are involved in TamilNet and computing development, offered felicitations.

Earlier, the Chief Minister and others witnessed a presentation on the virtual university's proposed activities. The presentation detailed the courses, course contents, and the TVU's digital library which contained books on Tamil literature, a lexicon and a glossary of Tamil technical terms.

Controversy Over Tamil Film Ban

CHENNAI: With the film-makers of "Kaatrukkenna Veali" accusing the Censor Board of acting against the Tamil's cause, the controversy surrounding the denial of Censor Board certificate to the movie is snowballing into a major showdown between the board and the Tamil film industry.

With the Film Certification Appellate Tribunal (FCAT) recently upholding the Board's decision not to issue the certificate, the 'Kaatrukkenna Veali' Joint Action Committee (JAC) headed by film director Bharatiraja has decided to hold a protest demonstration in front of the Regional Censor Board office at Nungambakkam on 23 February.

Interestingly, "Kaatrukkenna Veali" is the first Tamil film on the ethnic crisis in Sri Lanka and it is presently caught in a tussle with the Central Board for Film Certification due to its "indirect" reference to the banned LTTE and the Sri Lankan army.

The film's director Pugazhenthi Thangaraj claims that the movie deals with humanitarianism, but the Censor Board members see the reference to Sri Lanka, its Army and the "justification of militancy" objectionable.

The three-member FCAT chairman Justice Jaspal Singh, in his order dated February 16, says that the mention of a friendly-neighbour (Sri Lanka) and depicting its army in bad colours will not be to the liking of that government. However, he disagrees with the charge that the film glorifies the LTTE and the traits exhibited by their cadres.

The order came two days before the proposed public screening of the film on the sands of Marina on February 18, which was promptly banned by the city police. The screening was abandoned by the JAC and it organised a protest meeting of film personalities and writers.

Surprisingly, Justice Jaspal Singh's is the only dissenting voice in FCAT, with other members - Shiela Ghatate and Amitabh Sinha - favouring an outright rejection of the certificate. Singh says that the film can be certified with a few amendments and deletions in the script, including the scenes in which army men rape a Tamil girl and the extensive use of the term "tigers'".

"Kaatrukkenna Veali" is about an injured Tamil lady-militant from Sri Lanka reaching the shores of Tamil Nadu. She is treated by a doctor at a hospital in Nagapattinam district. As per the script, doctor Subash Chandra Bose of the Mahatma Gandhi Hospital provides asylum to lady-militant Manimegalai Selvanayagam and her associates, in spite of the fact that it was against law. He also helps in her escape to Sri Lanka. Central Board of Film Certification Chennai Regional Officer S Ramu says that the five Censor Board members, who scrutinised the movie for certification on June 13, last year, were unanimous in rejecting it. Similarly, the revising committee comprising 10 members too were against certifying the movie.

Meanwhile, the film makers allege that political interferences influenced the decision of the Censor Board. Another charge is that the members are against Tamil's interest. They also say that the board took nearly eight months to give its decision on the film. But these were stoutly denied by the board members.

Some of the members, who saw the film for certification, did not want them to be quoted in the story as the Film Certification Board national chairperson Asha Parekh had instructed them not to talk on the controversy surrounding the film. Meanwhile, one of the members of the Censor Board, journalist Sudangan, resigned in protest against the rejection of certificate to the film.

Dr. Mrs. Manorani Saravanamuttu

"Any violence ends with death". These are the words of Dr. Mrs. Manorani Saravanamuttu, a crusader against disappearances and a staunch defender of women's rights who passed away after a prolonged illness 13 February. She first came into the news following the brutal murder of her journalist son in 1990, the well known Richard de Zoysa. She was witness to the chilling abduction of her son from their home by some police personnel in the wee hours of February 18, 1990.

After a long conspiracy of silence, this case has now been brought to courts, meeting a long-felt need for the administration of justice in a case which epitomised the brutality of the regime which existed at that time in this country.

Dr. Saravanamuttu who never recovered from the trauma of seeing her son abducted, fought hard to keep the case alive. She played a significant role in the process of bringing suspects in the killing to courts. Deeply saddened but undefeated by this tragic loss, Dr. Saravanamuttu played a lead role in taking up the cause of the women who suffered the trauma of seeing their near and dear ones disappearing during the politico-social convulsions of the early Nineties. Thus she helped found the Mothers Front, a well known catalyst in the process of bringing justice to the women who saw their husbands and children disappear in those tragic times. "Today there are thousands of women who cry for their beloved. That sordid history should not be repeated," Dr. Saravanamuttu was quoted telling a Richard de Zoysa Commemoration meeting a few years ago.

She followed up this pioneering work in disappearances with the setting up of Centres for Family Services in many parts of the country. A crucial task undertaken by these bodies was to help women get on their feet through sustainable and paying livelihoods. In other words, they aimed at empowering women.

The personal misfortune suffered by her and her sense of injustice are certain to have played a crucial role in prompting Dr. Saravanamuttu into launching these projects for the well being of women.

Dr. Saravanamuttu was honoured with the Zonta Women of Achievement Award - 1998, for Leadership in Community Services. May she be granted eternal rest from the traumas of political repression she so stoically endured.

Lynn Ockersz

CLASSIFIED ADS

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MATRIMONIAL

Mother *seeks for daughter, 22, 5'5", B.Sc.(Hons) London, sociable, accomplished, living in London; an educated groom, Christian from a Catholic background. M 1226 c/o Tamil Times.*

Tamil Catholic parents *seek handsome groom for fair, pretty daughter, 29, part qualified accountant in employment in London. Religion no bar. M 1227 c/o Tamil Times.*

Hindu parents *seek bride for son, 37, in good employment in USA. M 1228 c/o Tamil Times.*

Jaffna Hindu mother *seeks groom for professional daughter, mid-thirties, in her own well established business in UK. Doctor or Accountant preferred. Send horoscope details. M 1229 c/o Tamil Times.*

Jaffna Hindu *seeks groom for sister, 38, 5' 3", Secretary of prestigious Company in Colombo. Please send horoscope details. M 1230 c/o Tamil Times.*

WEDDING BELLS

We congratulate the following couple on their recent wedding.

Sivamainthan, *son of late Prof. & Mrs Vithianathan and* **Shyamala,** *daughter of Mr. & Mrs. V.S. Gananathan, 1C Raag Durbar, 52A Sterling Road, Chennai 600034, India on 29th January 2001 at The GRT Grand Days Hotel, T. Nagar, Chennai 17, India.*

Wanted

A retired gentleman to assist in a small office in North West London. Please ring

020 7372 3576

OBITUARY

Dr. T. Varunalingam, *Retired Veterinary Surgeon, Department of Animal Production and Health; beloved husband of Kamaladevi; son of the late Mr. and Mrs. Thiyagaraja; son-in-law of the late Mr. Ponniah and of Mrs. Kanakammah; loving brother of Mrs. M. Kanagalingam, Mrs. Kugathasen, Mr. Sundaralingam, Mrs. P. Balasundaram, Mr. Vinayagalingam (London), Mr. Kanagalingam, Mrs. D. Swaminathan and Mr. Panchalingam; Sithappa of Piramila and Kohila Vinayagalingam died under tragic circumstances in Mitcham, Surrey, UK and was cremated at the Rowan Road Crematorium on Saturday, 10th February 2001.*

Dr. Varunalingam was a senior prefect and captain for athletics at St. Johns College, Jaffna and played cricket for college and the Peradeniya University.

The members of the family wish to express their sincere thanks and gratitude to all friends and relatives who attended the funeral, sent messages of sympathy and floral tributes and assisted in several ways during the period of grief. They regret their inability to thank individually. – T. Vinayagalingam, 23 Adlington Close, Edmonton, London N18 1XJ. Tel: 020 8807 7487.

Mr. Vimalraj Linganayagam (Raj), *beloved husband of Bianca; loving son of Mr. & Mrs. Linganayagam and beloved brother of Eric Nimalraj and Victor Sri Raj passed away peacefully in his sleep after a brief illness on 5th January 2001 at his home in Rushden. Northants. Funeral service and cremation took place on Tuesday, 16th January 2001 at Bedford.*

Members of the family thank all relatives and friends who attended the funeral, sent messages of sympathy, floral tributes and assisted in various ways during this period of bereavement and sorrow. - Address: V.T. Linganayagam, 90 Orchard Street, Kempston, Bedford MK42 7JJ, UK. Tel: 01234 8550817.

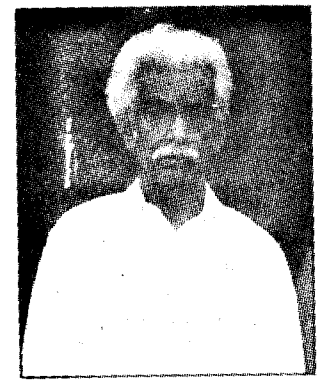
Born: 07.07.1938

Died: 02.02.2001

Sriskantha, *son of late Mr. S. Sinnathamby and of Mrs. Sinnathamby; son-in-law of late Mr. S. Sivaguru and of Mrs. S. Sivaguru; former husband of Vimalathevy; devoted father of Thirumurugan and Muhunthan; loving brother of Radhakrishnan, Vivekanandan, Jeyaraman, Vasantha, Sakunthala, Arunthathy and Manoranjitham passed away suddenly on 2nd February 2001. Funeral rites were performed at the family residence and cremation took place on 8th February.*

The members of the family wish to thank all friends and relatives who attended the funeral, sent messages of sympathy and floral tributes and assisted them in several ways during the period of bereavement. – Information from Mrs. Vimalathevy Thyagarajah, 72 Windborough Road, Carshalton Beeches, Surrey SM5 4QJ.

IN MEMORIAMS



In loving memory of **Canagaratnam Balendra** *on the first anniversary of his passing away on 18th February 2000.*

Sadly missed and fondly remembered by his beloved wife Parameswari; loving daughters Balini, Anushia, and Damayanthi; sons-in-law Chelvayogan Balendran and Sivamohan; grandchildren Gomathie, Meena, Athavan and Anjali; brothers Ramanathan, Subramaniam and Jeyaratnam; brother-in-law Vythilingam and sister-in-law Puvaneswary.

In loving memory of **Mrs Nagammah Kulanayagam,** *beloved wife of the late Mr. V*

continued on page 31

continued from page 30

Kulanayagam (Deputy Government Analyst, Colombo) and loving daughter of the late Mr. Kandiah (Upper Balangoda) and late Nallamma on the first anniversary of her passing away on 4th March 2000 at the age of 86 On Mahasivarathiri Day.

She served as a devoted mother to Pathma (Australia), Dr. Ganeshanayagam (Sri Lanka), Logi (Canada), Siva (UK); mother-in-law of Ratnasabapathy (Julius & Creasy, Sri Lanka), Pama (Australia), late Dr. Parameswaran, late V. Mariathasan (Rubber Metal Technique, Malaysia), Ilamurugan MBE (Customs and Excise, UK); grandmother of Manjula, Pradeepan, Niranjala, Shanthana, Prathayini, Vageesan, Sanjeev, Rajeev, Gajeev, Niranjan, and great grandmother of Radeesh, Thushara, Sahana and Arwin.

She will be fondly remembered and sadly missed by all who have known her. - 60 Portland Avenue, New Malden, Surrey KT3 6BA.

Second Death Anniversary
18.02.2001

Mrs Regina Rajanayagam

Sadly missed and fondly remembered by her beloved husband Rajanayagam; brothers Ratnam, Jesuthasan, Anton James and Prince; sister Cecilia Lawrence; brothers-in-law Dr. Arasaratam and Nadarajah; sisters-in-law Mrs. Anula Arasaratnam, Mrs. Parames Selvaratnam and Mrs. Mahes Sivayoganathan; niece Shamini and nephew Anton. - 13 Arbuthnot Lane, Bexley, Kent DA5 1EH.

Third Death Anniversary

In loving memory of **Mrs Pakiaratnam Kandiah** *on the third anniversary of her passing away on 3rd February 1998.*

Fondly remembered and sadly missed by her only sister Mrs Parimalaratnam Thirunavukarasu of Yogaswamy's Abode, Colombuthurai, Sri Lanka; children Sivayogaratnam, Sivayoganathan, Sivayogeswary, Sivayogaiswaran and Sivayogan; sons-in-law Varatharajah and Sivathas an; daughters-in-law Umasakthy, Sivayogi and Amirthavalli; several grandchildren and great grandchildren. - 3 New Leasow, Walmley, Sutton Coldfield, Birrningham B76 IYL.

Fourth Death Anniversary
Mohanadas. K. Samuel

(18.1.35 – 4.2.97)

Nothing loved is ever lost
Memories last for ever

Sadly missed and lovingly remembered by wife Utaiwan, children Monti, Manee and Mike, son-in-law Allan, grandson Nicolas, mother Rasamanie, sister Chandra, brothers Indran and Peter and their families.

In loving memory of **Thayapary Rasaendiran** *on the third anniversary of her passing away on 3rd February 1998.*

Sadly missed and lovingly remembered by her husband Rasaendiran and daughter Ranjini. - 34 Grangeway Gardens, Redbridge, Ilford, Essex 1G4 5HN.

The second anniversary of the passing away of **Mrs Sakthiamma Kanaganayagam** *wife of the late Senator S.R. Kanaganayagam falls on 27th February 2001.*

She is remembered with deep love and affection by her children, their families, nephews, nieces and a large circle of friends - 12 Fitzwilliam Road, Vaucluse, NSW 2030, Australia.

Third Death Anniversary

In loving memory of **Mrs Sivagamasoundaram Pararajasingham** *who passed away on 5th February 1998.*

A devoted wife and a loving mother.

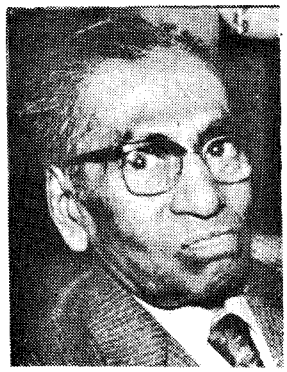
Deeply missed and affectionately remembered by your ever loving husband, children, families, nephews and nieces. – 27 Mayford, Howard Road, Surbiton Road, Surrey KT5 8SB.

IN MEMORIAMS (ctd)

Mr. Vallipuram Sellathamby
(Attorney-at-law, J.P., U.M., Point Pedro)

Years may pass, but your memory
Shall remain fresh in our hearts

Remembered with love and affection, on the fifth anniversary of your passing away on 21 February 1996 by your loving wife, children, son-in-law, daughter-in-law and grandchildren. - 50 Wiltshire Road, Thornton Heath, Surrey CR7 7QN.



In loving memory of **Mr. Chelliah Sivasampu** *on the ninth anniversary of his passing away on 9th March 1992.*

Sadly missed and fondly remembered by his two sons.

In loving memory of **Mrs. Annamuththu Kuddippillai** *on the second anniversary of her passing away on 17th February 1999.*

Fondly remembered by her children and their families, her grandchildren and families, her great grandchildren and families and also by the great great grandchildren and other reltives. – 3/100 Stapleton Stret, Pendle Hill, NSW 2145 Australia.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

Mar 1 *Karthigai; Feast of St. David, Patron of Wales.*

Mar 3 *South London Tamil Welfare Group (SLTWG) Drop In. Tel: 020 8542 3285.*

Mar 4 *Feast of St. Casimir.*

Mar 6 *Eckathasi.*

Mar 7 *Pirathosam*

Mar 8 *Masi Maham; Feast of St. John.*

Mar 9 *Full Moon; Feast of St. Francis.*

Mar 12 *Sankadakara Sathurthi.*

Mar 17 *Feast of St. Patrick, Patron of Ireland; SLTWG Drop In. Tel: 020 8542 3285.*

Mar 18 *Feast of St. Cyril.*

Mar 19 *Feast of St. Joseph.*

Mar 20 *Eekathasi.*

Mar 22 *Pirathosam.*

Mar 24 *Amavasai; SLTWG Women's Front meets. Tel: 020 8542 3285.*

Mar 25 *Feast of the Annunciation of the Lord, Jesus Christ.*

Mar 28 *Sathurthi; Karthigai.*

Mar 30 *Shashti.*

Prior Notice

Apr 3 *11 a.m. Colombuthurai Yoga Swamigal Abhisekham and Guru Poojah followed by Prasatham at Shree Ganapathy Temple, 123 Effra Road, London SW19.*

All welcome.

At Bhavan Centre, 4A Castletown Road, London W14 9HG. Tel: 020 7381 3056/4608.

Mar 3 *6.30 p.m. Hindustani Flute by Pandit Hariprasad Chauasia.*

Mar 17 *6.30 p.m. Tala Chakra by Shiva Shankar Ray (Tabla), M. Balachander (Mridangam) & Balu Raghuram (Violin).*

Mar 18 *6 p.m. Karnatic Violin by Sivaganesan & Bharata Natyam Srekala Bharat.*

Mar 31 *6.30 p.m. Kathak by Sushmita Ghosh & her senior disciples.*

Mr. K.V. Nadarajah, Former M.P. Bandarawela - An Appreciation

The passing away at the age of 96, of Mr. K.V. Nadarajah, the Badulla Attorney-at- law and former Member of Parliament for Bandarawela, brings to a close another chapter in the chequered history of Uva.

I was a schoolboy at Uva College, Badulla when KVN had a thriving practice at the Badulla bar. I recall the fair and handsome lawyer, a chain smoker, neatly dressed in a white satin drill suit. A popular figure at the Badulla Sports Club, he enjoyed a game of poker.

When I reached majority at 21, I had some legal dealings with him, since he represented the buyer of my late father's Bandarawela tea estate. KVN was a kind and compassionate man who was genuinely concerned at the misfortune that befell me on the loss of my inheritance.

Later as an office-bearer of the Uva Young Men's Buddhist Association, I would often meet KVN. Although, a non Sinhalese and a devout Hindu, he was one of the chief benefactors of the YMBA. We never returned with a refusal on our many visits to his hospitable home, seeking his assistance for various activities of the Association.

He was an ardent supporter of the pioneering efforts of the YMBA in building the Visakha Vidyalaya which today, is the leading Buddhist girls' school in Uva.

In the first post-independence parliamentary election in 1947, KVN won the Bandarawela seat as an independent candidate, and served as Member of Parliament till 1952. Although there was a sizeable vote among the tea plantation workers who too enjoyed the franchise, KVN was supported by the vast majority of Sinhalese as well. In fact, his election campaign was led by D.J. Horadugoda, another Badulla lawyer. It was an era when Uva was reputed for its communal harmony. We in Badulla took pride that Sinhalese, Tamils, Muslims, Malays, Burghers and Eurasians lived like one family. There was a considerable degree of inter-socialisation among the various ethnic groups, and no one in those proverbial good old days spoke in terms of race or religion.

K.V. Nadarajah was very much part of that fraternity. It therefore came as a rude shock to me in Canada, when in those dark days of July 1983, Badulla too was not spared the racial hatred that swept across the land. KVN's beautiful residence at Pingarawa was burnt to the ground. He had to flee for safety, escorted by his good friend and erstwhile parliamentary colleague, J.C.T. (Jack) Kotalawela, the former M.P. for Badulla, who took the Nadarajah family to the safety of his Barnes Place residence in Colombo.

'I had no where to go' KVN would say later. 'Jaffna was never my home. It was Badulla that was home to me'. Later the Nadarajahs moved to Washington. In 1990, KVN lost his wife of 56 years, Gnanamany, after a long illness. She was a gracious lady who had stood by her husband's side, and was also very much a part of Badulla life. I wrote to KVN. 'Your condolence gave me much comfort and relief' he wrote back, 'Thank you for writing and sharing my grief and emphasising the common denominator philosophy of all religions that death is not all that bad and terrible, and parting with loved ones must be taken in its stride. . . .'

In 1990, he had read my memoirs, 'Among my Souvenirs' in which there is a reference to the Nadarajah family of Badulla. He wrote to me from Washington. 'Reading the book, my memory went back to the days, when I had the pleasure of meeting and knowing you as a promising young man. Congratulations and wish you greater success. I am proud of you. You have not belied my hopes.'

During my 1996 sojourn from Canada in the Homeland, KVN was living in Jaela. He wanted me to see him as much as I wished to meet him. I did not get the chance – something I deeply regret thereafter. KVN bore no bitterness about the events of 1983, when he lost his Badulla. He always wanted to return to Sri Lanka. 'That is where I belong' he would say.

K.V. Nadarajah leaves his only son Bala also a lawyer, Bala's German wife Kristina and their children, Stefan and Nadine. He also leaves indelible memories of the Badulla that will not be the same again.

Kirthie Abeyesekera.

Queen Honours Ilamurugan

Mr. Chelvadurai Ilamurugan *was awarded an MBE in the 2001 New Year Honours of Her Majesty, the Queen 'for the extremely effective work that he had carried out and the excellent results he had achieved, serving with great distinction in the various grades and work areas of HM Customs and Excise, his positive, helpful and cheerful attitude, which helped maintain a working relationship with many multinational companies'.*

Mr. Ilamurugan earlier served the Inland Revenue Department and has completed 25 years of service. He left Sri Lanka in 1967 to pursue his studies in the UK and joined the Civil Service in 1972.

He is married with one son and resides at Portland Avenue, New Malden. He is the son of the late Mr. & Mrs. Chelvadurai of Inuvil, Jaffna and son-in-law of the late Mr. & Mrs. Kulanayagam of Colombo, Sri Lanka.

American Newsletter

Ontario Thamil Isai Kalamanram Celebrates

'Music is one of the lamps of human culture that has continued to glow with undiminished lustre throughout history; it is one of the few important factors that can promote world peace and solidarity' observed Abirami Vivekanandarajah who has this year pased the teachers grade in violin with distinction in the examinations conducted by the Thamil Isai Kalamanram of Ontario, Canada.

Paying her tribute to her gurus, V.R. Krishnan, Vijayaluxmy Sreenivasagam and Thanathevi Mitradeva, all of them of Sri-Lankan origin, she said that in this traditional guru muka moola system, a guru inspires in the sishya a joyous yearning for knowledge within the bounds of our culture and helping to create an enthusiasm in the subjects taught and enabling hidden talents and abilities in the young mind to bloom in glory.

The end of the final examinations at which nearly 500 students appeared in November last year, some of them in two or three subjects, means it is time for festivities. The Kalamanram celebrates this event with a musical festival and its popularity has been such that, this year it became a four-day event over two weekends, January 27th, 28th and February 3rd, 4th at the Astonbee Campus of Centennial College in Scarborough, Toronto.

Founded nearly ten years ago, the Kalamanram has popular support amidst the expatriate Tamil community in Ontario counting a membership of over 300 families and individuals. Its status is akin to the Trinity College of Music and is the only institution that conducts regular examinations in carnatic Music, apart from the regular concerts conducted throughout the year at different venues. This year the Kalamanram conducted its first examinations in Montreal, Quebec and it is possible that other regions such as Winnipeg in Manitoba and Vancouver in British Columbia will benefit from its services in the very near future.

The Kalamanram has steered clear of politics of all kinds and has strenuously impressed on the expatriate community that its objective is to foster the rich culture of Carnatic music and help to build bridges in multicultural Canada. This has been quite a challenge for the Kalamanram, but the vision and determination of its leaders has ensured that its stand and commitment has been greatly appreciated by the Tamil community.

The encouragement given by the Kalamanram since its inception, its president Thampiah Sripathy pointed out has helped to train a number of artistes who are experts of great merit in various disciplines of Carnatic Music. 'Some of our artistes can today take their places with pride even on South Indian stages along with vocalists and instrumentalists of great repute there,' he observed with a tremendous sense of achievement. 'We will provide facilities for our young people, encourage and inspire them in the pursuit of our rich cultural heirlooms and that is the type of leadership that we can offer to our community' said Mr. Sripathy.

Among the artistes who took part in this year's musical festival, apart from a number of students were Isaimamani Poomani Rajaratnam (vocal), Vidwan S. Ravindran (violin), Krishna Rajaratnam (mridangam), Sangeetha Vidwan Prema Sriskandarajah (vocal), Sivananthini Kathirgamanathan (violin), Vasudevan Rajalingam (mridangam), Kalaimamani Janani Prabhakaran (veena), Sangeetha Pooshanam Pon Suntharalingam (vocal), Thanathevi Mithradeva (violin), Karaikudi Krishnamurthi (mridangam), Abhirami Vivekanandarajah (violin), Aiyathurai Velauthapillai (vocal), Krishnamurthi Udayakumar (mridangam). In the various concerts the students of Mridanga Seshtram under training from their guru Vasudevan Rajalingam provided percussionist accompaniment of gatam, kanchira and morsing.

As is the practice of the Kalamanram during the festival concerts, various artistes were honoured for their dedication to Carnatic music and services to the community.

New York Audience in Raptures

A concert of Carnatic Music was held recently in the beautiful village of Van Hornesville in New York State, USA at which the Chief Guest was Geetha Ramanathan Bennet, a veena virtuoso and vocalist of great merit. Geetha's performance both as a veena player and a vocalist was exultation in ecstatic enjoyment.

In her audience that evening most people were unfamiliar with Southern India's Carnatic music traditions and yet she captured their hearts and feelings and wrapped them into blissful raptures. She was accompanied by her husband Frank Bennet on the mrdangam and Rusty Gillette on the ghatam. Geetha who has made USA her home with her family, hails from Chennai in India and belongs to a family deeply immersed in classic music traditions.

Geetha's concert followed by one night the premiere of her husband's concert for veena and orchestra entitled Asian Colours by the Utica Symphony Orchestra led by the Maestro, Charles Schneider. Referring to Geetha's concert as a rousing experience, Donna Veederof Jordanville, New York wrote: 'This was the most exciting concert we have ever had in this facility which is an old Unitarian Universalist Church. It has great acoustics since it is a wooden structure with no rugs or curtains and has large stained glass windows.

This music which I have heard occasionally as background music for movies made in India, but did not know what to call it. We hope they will come back sometime and play for us again. This trio has been together for a longtime and they work very well with one another. They told us this is Tamil music and that the instruments try to imitate the human voice.'

Victor Karunairajan, Canada.

Heart-Felt Appeal

The Putney Church launched an appeal to raise funds for war-torn hospitals in North and East Sri Lanka at their Carol Services. Putney Church's Hammersmith and Harrow Congregations were able to raise well over a Thousand pounds. The Church Council President, **Mr. Rajan** *confirms that these funds will be faithfully channelled shortly.*

Revd. B.J. Alexander, *Minister, Putney commented 'The church will continue to play a vital role in this practical manner. It's our divine call that calls for response to human suffering and struggle'.*

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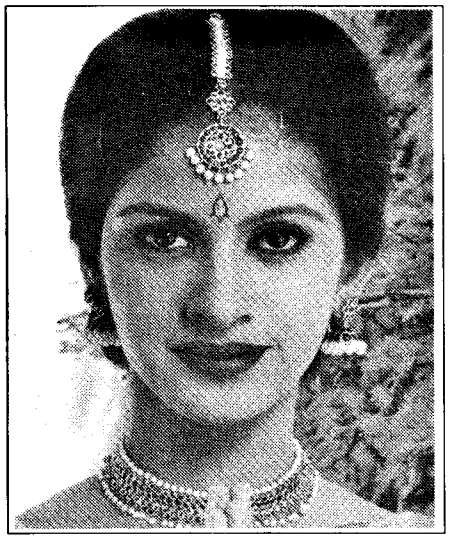

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